

Lesson 9 | October 29, 2023

Pornography Is Destructive

Study Text: Numbers 15:37–40; 2 Samuel 11:2–5; 12:1–13; Job 31:1–8; Matthew 5:27–30; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20; James 1:13–15; 1 John 2:15–16

Central Truth: God demands sexual purity.

Key Verse: Proverbs 4:23

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life (KJV).

Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will recognize the danger of pornography.
- Students will discern the various ways Satan introduces people to pornography and will take steps to avoid being caught in the trap.
- Students will evaluate their lives and actively remove anything that could lead them into pornography.

Introducing the Study

Say: Although the topic of today’s lesson is rarely addressed in the Church, we are not immune to the scourge of pornography sweeping our society. According to the accountability software company Covenant Eyes, 64 percent of Christian men and 15 percent of Christian women say they watch pornography at least once a month; 1 in 5 youth pastors and 1 in 7 senior pastors use pornography on a regular basis; and 43 percent of pastors say they have struggled with pornography in the past.¹ While we may not all agree on the criteria for determining what constitutes *pornography*, these statistics indicate the problem is alarmingly prevalent—even in the Church.

Opening Activity—Innocent or Not?

Ask: *What seemingly innocent activities does Satan use to ensnare believers in pornography?*

Often, people stumble into pornography addiction through accidentally viewing it online or by consuming media with sexualized themes.

Say: No one is immune to the temptation of pornography, so we must stay on alert and guard against Satan’s attacks. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The growing problem of Christians using pornography is morally devastating for two reasons. First, Christians using pornography defile themselves, disobeying God’s desire for sexual purity (1 Thessalonians 4:3–4). Second, its use among believers hinders the Church’s impact. In this lesson, we’ll learn why pornography is so destructive, how it affects users, and what steps we can take to avoid and overcome it.

¹ “Pornography Statistics.” CovenantEyes. Accessed March 29, 2022. <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats>.

Part 1—Sexual Lust Is Serious Business

Don't Take It Lightly

Matthew 5:27–30

Say: People often fail to treat the sin of pornography seriously, because they choose not to treat the sin of lust seriously. After all, lust is unseen and private (though the consequences can be all too public). Those who are caught up in lust can delude themselves by thinking, “I’m not hurting anyone,” or “Everybody looks. It’s only natural!” But the sin of lust connects the destructive activity of a person’s eyes to the condition of their heart. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Our culture compounds the problem of pornography. While other sins like greed, violence, and racism are often condemned, lust is an advertising tool and entertainment standard. Erotic imagery sells products and entices the eye in virtually every public place. The temptation to lust is ever present. Society’s approval makes it easier to justify.

Scripture points us in the opposite direction, emphasizing God’s knowledge of both outward and inward sins. God pointed out to Ezekiel the foolishness of thinking certain vices could remain unseen. “Son of man, have you seen what the leaders of Israel are doing with their idols in dark rooms? They are saying, ‘The LORD doesn’t see us; he has deserted our land!’” (Ezekiel 8:12, NLT). Our choices are never hidden from Him.

Then in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it clear that God abhors lust specifically (Matthew 5:27–30). The measures Jesus mentions to avoid sin—cutting off offensive hands and gouging out offensive eyes—may seem drastic, even shocking, but they clearly illustrate the gravity of His teaching. Lust is as serious as other sins. Believers should do whatever is necessary to avoid and overcome it.

At its essence, sexual lust is envy. While sexual desire between marriage partners is normal and ordained by God, lust involves coveting a person completely outside the bounds of what God has given you. That makes the sin of pornography all the more serious, because it personalizes the sin of lust—usually relegated to the mind—by using the faces and bodies of real people, each of whom is made in God’s image. Pornography is commercialized fantasy, exploiting participants and viewers alike.

Resource Packet Item 1: Paul on Purity

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to look up the Scriptures and note Paul’s teaching about purity.

Discuss

? In what ways do you avoid materials in your home that could incite lust? What additional measures might be necessary?

? Should church leaders be talking to young people about pornography? Or should the responsibility of addressing this issue be left up to parents?

Not of This World

1 John 2:15–16

Say: The “lust of the flesh” and the “lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:16, KJV) are products of loving the world more than God. They embrace a moment of desire without the connection God intended for sexual relations between husband and wife. There is no intimacy in pornography—just an intense experience in which a user connects with no one, communicates with no one, and grows in relationship with no one. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we discussed in last week’s lesson, God designed people with an inherent need for companionship. “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18, KJV). In response to that human need, God created a heterosexual covenant partnership that included permanence (verse 24) and faithfulness (Hebrews 13:4). Husbands and wives are instructed to meet each other’s sexual needs (1 Corinthians 7:3–5), which were created and celebrated by God.

God has always called His people to be holy or set apart from the ways of the world (Deuteronomy 14:2; 1 Peter 2:9–10). He is a God of covenant faithfulness, and He requires the same of us. Pornography thwarts God’s design. It appeals to the lust of the flesh, circumventing sexual purity and replacing it with a momentary, hyper-stimulating experience.

People use pornography in an attempt to meet their desire for physical intimacy without committing themselves to a marriage covenant. In that sense, pornography not only gratifies sexual lust, but it also caters to human selfishness and fits the unholy circle John described: “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16, KJV). Pornography caters to the mindset that says, “It’s all about me.” This kind of self-centeredness limits a person’s ability to create a deep bond with someone else and sustain it in a marriage relationship.

The world peddles in lust and pride, offering temporary and meaningless pleasures in return, but God’s sober reminder is to seek His will and His kingdom first (Matthew 6:10,33). “You are not controlled by your sinful nature” (Romans 8:9, NLT), and you “do not belong to this world” (John 17:16, NLT).

Discuss

? What effect do you think the widespread use of pornography might be having on people of all ages?

? Do you think a person can become addicted to pornography? Why?

Part 2—Cost and Consequences

A Heart Issue

James 1:13–15

Say: The world may strategize ways to draw people into pornography, but each individual decides whether they will yield to temptation. Avoiding the snare of pornography is every believer’s responsibility. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

James asserted that temptation never comes from God, but it “comes from our own desires, which . . . give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death” (James 1:14–15, NLT). The tempting path to pornography follows a pattern as well: arousal, consideration, and indulgence. The immediate result of giving in to the temptation is mental and spiritual defilement. One of the many long-term consequences is the person’s heart becomes increasingly less receptive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 4:17–19).

A person who is tempted to view pornography may be looking for a distraction from life’s hardships or a temporary rush to numb a deeper pain. The thrill of looking at erotic imagery sends powerful chemicals to the brain, creating lasting neural pathways that can affect future behavior. It’s almost as if the pornography were saying, “When you need to feel good or be distracted, I’m here for you.”

The craving to repeat that experience is what it means to be “drawn away of his [or her] own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14, KJV). That’s when a decision is made: I *will* yield, or I *will not* yield. Before giving in to temptation, there is a moment when a Christian must say, “I know this is wrong. I know it hurts the heart of God. But I give myself permission to do it anyway.”

Our evil desires then “give birth to sinful actions,” leading eventually to death (verse 15, NLT). This could include the death of a marriage, ministry, career, and reputation. It could cause the death of a person’s conscience—the hardening of the heart—and eventually result in condemnation and spiritual death.

Each time a person yields to temptation, the heart is hardened all the more toward God, loved ones, and fellow believers. Saying “I will do what I want” makes our conscience more calloused toward the Spirit of God and the truth of His Word. Before long, rebellion grows in other areas of life, since a little yeast always “spreads through the whole batch of dough” (Galatians 5:9, NLT). Where pornography is allowed, compromise, carnality, and a lukewarm attitude will surely follow.

Resource Packet Item 2: Purity in Practice

Distribute the worksheet, read the case studies aloud, and discuss the best way to respond in each situation. (Use the tips on pages 2–3 of this guide to ensure the classroom discussion honors God and protects others’ privacy and dignity.)

Discuss

? Have you ever had difficulty breaking a habit? How did you overcome the problem? What worked, and what didn’t?

? Why do you think a believer who “has become a new person” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NLT) still experiences old temptations?

? Do Christians ever reach the point of being immune to temptation? Why or why not?

Broken Hearts

2 Samuel 11:2–5; 12:1–13

Say: Some may claim pornography is a victimless sin that doesn't affect anyone else. Nothing could be further from the truth. The lust behind pornography use is the same driving force that leads to any sexual sin. Not only does lust harm an individual's purity, but it is often a gateway to further sexual activity that is destructive for others. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

David may have thought the risks were low when he leered at Bathsheba from his palace rooftop. *Nobody will know. Nobody will get hurt.* But sin never plays out that way. Lust in any form damages the perpetrator—clouding judgment, creating dependence, distorting reality, and hardening the heart—and can cause irreparable harm to the person being objectified.

Pornography in particular destroys marriages, depriving spouses of intimacy, betraying their trust, insulting their dignity, and causing them to doubt their value. It breaks families apart and confuses children. It damages the church, since the spiritual state of each member of the body of Christ affects the entire Body (1 Corinthians 12:26). It exploits the people involved in the creation of pornography, since their inherent value, due dignity, and personal purity are exchanged for financial gain. It warps God's good gift of sexual intimacy, turning it into something twisted and ugly. Pornography is no victimless sin.

David's initial sin of lust grew to include deceit, adultery, and even murder. Although God forgave him when he confessed (2 Samuel 12:13), there were lasting consequences, including the death of the child he conceived with Bathsheba (verses 14–23). Amazingly, in a beautiful picture of God's grace, the eternal throne He had promised David in 2 Samuel 7 would be established through Jesus, a descendant of Bathsheba's son Solomon.

Discuss

? God described David as “a man after mine own heart” (Acts 13:22, KJV). How can you explain why a godly man would behave in such an ungodly way?

? Do you think consuming pornography is equivalent to committing adultery? Why or why not?

Part 3—Staying on Guard

Guard Your Eyes

Job 31:1–8

Say: Following Jesus means staying alert, ready for any attack the enemy may launch against us. In many cases, guarding our eyes is the first line of defense. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Job's covenant with his eyes—“not to look with lust at a young woman” (Job 31:1, NLT)—is crucial for each of us to make. The lethal repercussions of lust all begin with a simple look. David looked at Bathsheba, and because he kept looking, a child died and an innocent man was murdered. As Jesus taught, “Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness” (Matthew 6:22–23, NLT).

So what should a person do to break the habit of viewing pornography? First and foremost, confess the sin to God, praying like David for both forgiveness and cleansing (see Psalm 51). But since pornography is highly addictive, rarely can anyone overcome it alone. The seriousness of the issue calls for *confession* to another person (see James 5:16, NLT), *separation* through blocking software or other means (Matthew 5:29), ongoing personal accountability (Hebrews 3:13; Galatians 6:1–2), commitment to regular fellowship and spiritual disciplines (Acts 2:42,46), and godly counsel from a pastor or Christian mentor (Proverbs 11:14; 24:6). With time, diligence, and the Holy Spirit’s help, a person can learn to manage temptation when it happens.

Resource Packet Item 3: The Power of Accountability

Encourage students to put accountability measures in place and prayerfully consider the personal reflection question on their own.

Discuss

? Why do you think humans are so easily ensnared by what we see? What practical steps do you take to battle this tendency?

? Have you ever asked someone to hold you accountable as you were trying to overcome a deeply ingrained habit or addiction? What was the result?

Guard Your Heart

Numbers 15:37–40; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

Say: Not only do we defend ourselves against the enemy’s attacks by guarding our eyes, but we also must guard our hearts. As the writer of Proverbs admonishes, “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (Proverbs 4:23, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In His kindness, God gave His people methods to help them remember not to follow their own desires or defile themselves “as you are prone to do” (Numbers 15:39, NLT). He knew they would need constant reminders to guard their hearts against habitual sins—and so do we. Finding practical methods to guard against sin can be just as useful as committing to spiritual methods or disciplines.

We tend to think we own ourselves. We’re largely in charge of our bodies, so we mistakenly assume they’re our property. But the truth is, we belong to God. He is the owner; we are the managers. This makes our commitment to purity even more necessary. Owners commission managers to oversee their property, entrusting them with authority to make decisions, correct problems, and generally “keep the place up.” But we should always remember the difference between a *manager* and an *owner*. One has responsibility; the other has final authority.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding sexual purity, he appealed to the theme of God’s ownership. “You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20, NLT).

According to the Parable of the Three Servants (Matthew 25:14–30), God has entrusted each of His followers with certain assets and responsibilities, including our physical bodies. As in the

parable, the Owner will one day demand an account from the manager for the way the property was cared for, including “the good or evil we have done in this earthly body” (2 Corinthians 5:10, NLT). One of the best ways to guard our hearts against lust is to keep in mind the moment we’ll answer for the choices we made and the ways we invested in our relationships.

Considering all this, it’s clear pornography is a weight we cannot afford to carry if the goal is to finish the race well (Hebrews 12:1). If pornography has never ensnared you, be sure to avoid the trap. If you are currently struggling with pornography, (1) confess your sin to God, (2) distance yourself from it, and (3) immediately reach out for help in order to (4) “make sure that you stay free” (Galatians 5:1, NLT).

Discuss

? Read Romans 7:14 through 8:2. Why do you think Christians sometimes fall back into their old sinful ways? What is the solution?

? What are some practical ways believers can guard their hearts?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Pornography is far more prevalent in our culture and our churches than we want to believe. The severity of this sin cannot be overlooked, for God calls His people to “speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church” (Ephesians 4:15, NLT). When we pursue holiness and integrity in our private lives—the secret moments nobody else sees—we glorify God and enjoy the blessings of healthy relationships.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Spend some extra time in prayer and self-examination. Are you entertaining thoughts that displease God? Are you reading or watching things that dishonor Him and people created in His image? Are you dangerously close to giving in to sexual temptation?
- Sign up for internet and screen accountability software (like Covenant Eyes) to help you avoid online temptation.
- If someone confides in you that they’re struggling with pornography addiction, offer to be an accountability and prayer partner.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Run from Temptation.
Genesis 39:1–12

Tuesday:

Turn My Eyes Away.
Psalm 119:33–40

Wednesday:

Beware of Sexual Traps.
Proverbs 7:10–12, 21–27

Thursday:

Rebuke of Sexual Immorality.

1 Corinthians 5:1–13

Friday:

Do Not Live in Darkness.

Ephesians 5:8–16

Saturday:

Dragged Away by Lust.

James 1:13–15