Minister shares tragedy of being 'pornoholic'

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Editor's Note: The article below was submitted by a minister wanting to help others realize the addictive and destructive nature of pornography. The Journal *honors his request to remain anonymous.*

As you go into the building, you glance around to see if there is anyone you know who might be able to identify you. You check every direction, peering into passing cars. You do the same routine as you leave. With a wary eye, you survey the scene to see if you have been detected. Even if you're out of your neighborhood, or in a distant city, there is always the paranoia. Your mind races; how do I explain my presence here if someone has seen me? You never speak to anyone. This is your secret life; it is your own private world. You say that you are just curious; you will not do this again. Yet you continue to go, always wondering if you will be caught this time. Sometimes you wish you would be so that you could end the matter. You promise yourself that this is it. Yet the temptation comes and the desire overwhelms. So you go back, looking, fearing, watching, despising yourself.

So it is when one is a "Pornoholic." I know whereof I speak. Like thousands of others, many of them Christians like myself, I am hooked on pornography. It is an addiction as compelling as alcohol and although the effects may not seem so devastating, it is just as severe in many ways. For years I have moved secretly to places where pornography is pandered. I have been to the adult book stores, the movie houses, the strip-tease joints, the topless restaurants, all to catch a glimpse of the lewdness exhibited there. I searched for new thrills and excitement. I looked for a high in pleasure, but it always seemed out of reach. In my private world of sin and lust, I quietly imbibed on the forbidden fruit, eagerly cultivating my uncontrolled desire. It was easy to do. Since I managed my own time--I am a minister--and because panderers know that the days are as good as the nights for such activities, I was able to go where I desired when I desired. I could catch an hour or so of my pornography under the guise of going to a hospital, the Bible book store, a pastoral visit; there was no one around to call it into question. Only the fear of being caught by accident was a continual problem, and the chances were small in the large cities in which we lived. But, why do it?

I have been a happily married man for many years, have lovely children and a wonderful wife. Our marriage has been very good; there have been a few rough spots, but nothing major. Our sexual experience has been very satisfying. We maintained the level of excitement and suspense that is needed. Yet here was a recurring problem for me. With all of that, it never made any sense to continue in the pornography. It added nothing to my life or my marriage. I wanted to stop, yet I couldn't. In a way, I was at this point morally bankrupt.

It all began rather slowly. There was the first of the materials in *Playboy* and other such magazines. In college a couple of us went to the big city and visited a "night spot" that featured nudist camp movies. It seemed innocent enough. But movies were becoming more risque and one was able to catch more and more sex in them. As morals loosened in the regular theater, so did the rise of the X-rated movies and the strip joints. My morals seemed to be keeping a nice pace. It became a time of increasing involvement. From the magazines, to the movies, to the strip shows, it grew. Each step was made more easily because of the last. It also seemed more necessary. James was right when he described the nature of sin: "But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." (James 1:14-15, NIV) Carried away by my own lust, I allowed pornography to sink its teeth deeply into me. It grew and grew and grew. I knew it was wrong, but I was no longer in control. According to James, I was on the road to death.

But it was far from over. Now there was a need to expand territory. Little by little it became impossible to see women as people. They became objects in the movies and on the stages, and my mind began to picture them that way at all times. Slowly and surely, I was creating a fantasy world that saw every woman as a sex object, a source of pleasure for my mind. It was becoming an impossibility to view women without thinking some illicit thoughts. I was growing to hate this part of me more and more, but finding that I could do little about it.

I longed to get help to overcome this part of my life, but I was afraid to admit the problem to anyone. Who could I tell? How could I confess to such a heinous way of life? It was so wrong that I was embarrassed to talk of it to anyone. It was my private world. I had a good friend and former professor who was in a counseling ministry that I thought could help. Yet I found that each time I planned to go to him, the embarrassment was too great and I could rationalize that I was going to make it on my own. I put off getting help for years. Not only had Satan led me down this path, but he was also putting before me the idea that it was either okay to stay on it or that I could stop at any time.

Pornography and its thoughts affected everything that I did. My church work became less and less effective. My marriage suffered. I became angry at myself and slowly at everything around me. I decided at one point that only an affair would bring the needed satisfaction that I was now feeling. I hated the thought of risking a good marriage, yet I had friends who were "enjoying" affairs and I didn't want to be left out. I wanted the satisfaction of another relationship. Emotionally I was obsessed with the idea and looked for the opportunity. All of the materials and thoughts had now so warped my thinking that I was no longer capable of making good decisions about reality, especially in this portion of my life.

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The costs of my habit were growing. The financial commitments were not that great although they were not particularly cheap. A few dollars here and there were not greatly missed by my wife. And I handled the checkbook and could hide the outlay easily enough. The cost in time was great and growing, but the amount of time that it pulled my mind from other matters was staggering. It possessed me more and more. I longed for more and new entertainment. It was available. I looked at every woman I knew with thoughts of an affair. My need to lie about things grew and I found that I was more deeply involved in my lying than I had ever been before. My whole personality seemed to be changing. I was growing more angry, bitter, and sarcastic. Satan's hold was firm. Finally, I snapped.

In anger and disgust over every little problem that I had faced, I left my ministry. I wanted nothing to do with the church or Christian people. I considered leaving my family. I was suffering from severe bouts of depression for the first time in my life. The cost of this sin had taken its toll. I was at the lowest point in my life. I had left the only work I knew and for which I had been trained. I knew a bit about sales and although I was not in a good position, I had found a job. We would have to move out of the parsonage and find a home in an expensive city. Now I was confronted with the cost of my pornoholism, although it was to be several years before I understood that it was the cause of all this chaos.

Strangely enough, the next few years turned out well in terms of worldly success. I was able to find work easily, although the pay was low at first. We survived somehow in the midst of some rather small paychecks. We worked hard, and often carried two or three part-time jobs. But breaks came. I gained credibility in a field that I knew little about in a short period of time. I moved into middle management because of my ability to move up rapidly in a non-church related world. I found my way back to church and back to Christian friends. But the problem never went away. Having my time more structured for a while, I found that I was not attending the porno places as regularly, although I managed a few stops here and there. Then times of travel came and the hours away from home and the overnight trips afforded me the opportunity to set my own agenda anew. I was falling back into the old trap again, and my mind continued to race about the possibilities of affairs with members of my office staff. But I still refused to admit that I could not escape and did not seek help.

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In spite of the problem that I still had, I was now considering a return to the ministry. I had written to several churches, but had not heard from any of them. My desire was to be led of the Lord, and He seemed to be giving me a growing sense of dissatisfaction with my secular work and more strength in my ability to serve in the local church. Then it happened. I was suddenly and unexpectedly fired from my job. As I sought new employment, I turned to two types of openings; business and church. I asked the Lord to open the door which I should enter. I was offered a ministry that seemed almost too good to be true. My personality and that of the congregation seemed to mesh perfectly. But my long affair with pornography was not over. It was still in the picture and threatened things anew. Through His divine providence, the Lord presented opportunities that caused my eyes to be opened. It became as clear as a picture that the cause of my failure in my earlier ministry had come because of my pornography and its results. It became equally clear that unless I made drastic changes in my life the same end would come again. It had to change.

Finally, I sought help. I found a Christian counselor to whom I could confess this sin. I sought forgiveness and healing. The recovering period had now begun. After twenty years, much anguish, and lost time, I was now moving in the right direction. The battle is not over; the problem is still evident. I still have many temptations and often have the illicit thoughts about women. My eyes and my mind wander more often that I care to admit, but recovery and forgiveness are in progress.

If there were a creed like that of the A.A. that states, "I am an alcoholic," I would have to confess that "I am a pornoholic." I have been down that road. I have paid the price for it and I know that I am always on the verge of falling back into it again. Even though I enjoy the forgiveness of God's mercy, I also know that Satan knows this great weakness of mine and that he will use it to destroy me again, if he can. How reassuring that the power of God is greater than that of Satan and that the promise is that there will always be a way of escape from our temptations.

The question now is, what next? I have always been a bit of a crusader in my work and had some problems with pushing matters which did not seem overly important to a portion of my congregation. My secular work taught me organizational skills from the standpoint of developing community type programs. Is there a leading from the Lord at this point to be actively involved with other congregations in our area to help rid our community of the problem of public pornography? Frankly I often hesitate on this matter because of my involvement. But the cost to all is great. The connection between the pornography and the destruction of the mind is so very real. The fear of child pornography is growing so rapidly. The effects on people's lives are so great. Perhaps God has prepared me in this area and allowed me to feel these effects so personally for this reason. Pornography is sin. It has infiltrated the society and the church. Maybe it is time for the crusade to begin in our community. Perhaps the Lord has led me to and through this for this very reason.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...
--Hosea 4:6

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