

# I'm a Porn Struggler

## 1. A Multi-Front War: Four-fold Strategy to Attack the Porn Problem

A multi-front war is the hardest kind of war to win.

There are enemies, and the fronts in this war are the avenues by which these enemies attack.

My goal is to help you see those connections, to understand a bit more how to coordinate a strategy for the multiple fronts of this war.

The war against pornography cannot be reduced to a single front—it's not just about deciding not to look at it again, getting rid of internet access in your apartment, having an accountability partner, or even praying more.

But this multi-front war is *not* a losing war. A Christian's resources are unlimited, and fresh supplies are always on time, with more on the way.

### Meet the Four Fronts

The four fronts: the God Front, the Self Front, the People Front, and the Circumstance Front. These are meant to represent the different spheres of reality in which human beings function and respond.

By *the God Front*, we mean the specific battle of how the heart relates to God—by faith or by unbelief. It would have worked to call this *the Faith Front* as well.

*The Circumstance Front* is the battle with lust in the daily situation in which a person finds himself. This battle will involve careful strategy about everything in life—using computers and mobile devices, planning weekends, making travel arrangements, setting up daily schedules, thinking carefully about living situations.

*The Self Front* is simply the internal battle for governance over one's own thinking, desires, feelings, and intentions. It's no secret that we all live out of a sense of identity that is shaped by our memories, our dedications, our value systems, and our secret longings.

*The People Front* is the battle with lust over the relationships in a person's life. Giving into sexual lust has devastating effects on relationship.

All four fronts must be considered for a strategy to be effective.

### **Four Fronts, One Victory**

As a Christian stops relying on himself to defeat sin, and puts his faith in Christ's finished work on the Cross, he will enter into a trajectory of success that begins to put to death the sin that has entangled him for so long, and he also starts living in the fullness of life that God intends for him.

*A strategy for victory on the multiple fronts of this war must be arranged upon the victory already accomplished by Christ.*

## **2. Practical Realities: Counseling a Porn Struggler**

### **The Case Study—David, a Single-man Addicted to Porn**

Twenty-three and single, David has wrestled with pornography for years. He fights daily, some days winning, many days losing. He is doing what he should do, but he knows he needs help. So, he's come to you.

David's struggles started in ninth grade. Several of his friends were looking at pornography on their computers, which is how he was introduced to it. He remembers looking for it on his own, and it didn't take long to find it. Staring at a naked woman for the first time, he was both surprised and excited. He felt a mixture of curiosity and arousal all at the same time. The day after he felt ashamed, so he avoided going back to the website for a few months. His parents hadn't said anything to him about sex, leaving him to figure it out on his own.

He lingered over that initial excited feeling, and his curiosity got to him. Two months later, he looked again. He found a pornographic site, and plunged in. Over the next few days, and then weeks, he looked daily, and his hunger grew, and grew, and grew. His desire for porn quickly overtook his life. One day, his father walked in as David was consuming nude pictures. Shocked, his father didn't know what to do at first. Muscles on his face tightened, eyebrows furrowed, his father bellowed out, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" Silence. David didn't say a word. All he could do was wallow in shame. He looked down, not able to make eye contact with his father. The next thirty minutes were painful. His father cross-examined him, every question laced with anger. David owned up to his struggles, but that didn't make the conversation any easier.

The next day, his father offered accountability. They met a couple of times over the coming weeks. But, as normal, his father got busy with other things. Accountability dropped off. Left alone again, David fought his addiction on his own. And a seed of bitterness was planted in his heart.

The Lord saved David at the end of high school through a youth group retreat. The porn stopped for a few months after his conversion. Several times he thought, “Maybe I’m finally done with this? Maybe I’m finally free of the porn?” But that turned out to not be true.

In college, it took no more than a few weeks before David hunted for porn again. This continued with only brief periods of reprieve. “In college, I talked with my pastor, but he got frustrated with me. He kept telling me the same things—repent of my sin, read my Bible, pray, trust in Christ. After a while, it was as if the pastor didn’t know what else to say,” recalls David, this time with a look of frustration. “I kept on reading, repenting, and praying, but nothing changed.”

After college David moved to a major city to start a new job. He resolved to do something about the problem. He read Scripture, prayed, and read books about fighting pornography, but, on his own, he didn’t find success in stopping his sin.

In his first meeting with you, he confesses, “I feel like a *major* failure. I can go a few days without doing it, but then I always come back to it. I can’t help it. I need more. But I do it again and then I feel horrible afterwards,” says David, with guilt written all over his face. “It’s like a dog returning to his own vomit.”

David slugs his way through a stressful job. Overwhelmed by the pressure, he locks the door at work and submerges himself in porn. None of his roommates know about the problem. Apart from you, no one else at church knows about it.

David’s shame stands as a barrier that keeps him from talking to others. “I’m very, very embarrassed about my struggles,” he says. “I feel dirty every time I finish a bout with pornography.” He talks to his best friend Jason, but transparent conversations are rare. Their schedules are so busy; they live like two ships passing in the night. David has a few friends at church, but for the most part, he feels trapped in terminally casual relationships. Most of his friendships with other men lack depth and genuine vulnerability. He often feels alone.

He recently asked out a girl at the church, but she turned him down. In the aftermath, his feelings of rejection piled on top of his lingering guilt from the porn addiction.

Some days David downplays the problem. He thinks, “It’s not that big of a deal,” or “I can get control of it,” or “it’s not going to hurt anyone,” or “one day when I’m married, this will all go away,” or even, “I don’t want to burden other people.” At other points he obsesses over his struggle so much that he doubts whether or not he is even saved. David finally came to the end of himself and realized he was deceiving himself, which is why he came to you for help.

Doubts often plague him because his porn struggles stubbornly persist. When he describes God, he says, “I know God is good, but he is not good *to me*.”

### **Fighting on Four Battle Fronts**

Let’s think through our four fronts of the battle...

#### ***The God Front***

Remember that the God front focuses on the spiritual parts of this battle—anything that deals with God, Christ, sin, faith, hope, etc.

We want to know about David’s personal relationship with God.

David does not genuinely believe God cares about him. His distorted view of God needs to change. *One thing we can do as a discipler is help David see who God is—to personally understand God’s character and his love.*

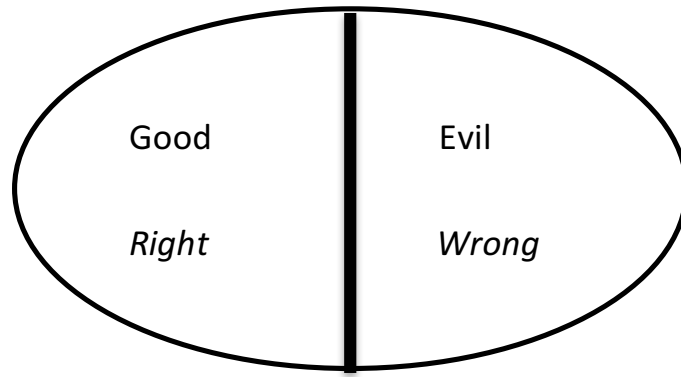
We want to ask about David’s sin struggles.

The longer an addict looks at porn, the more momentum he will have built in that direction, and the harder it will be to reverse the patterns.

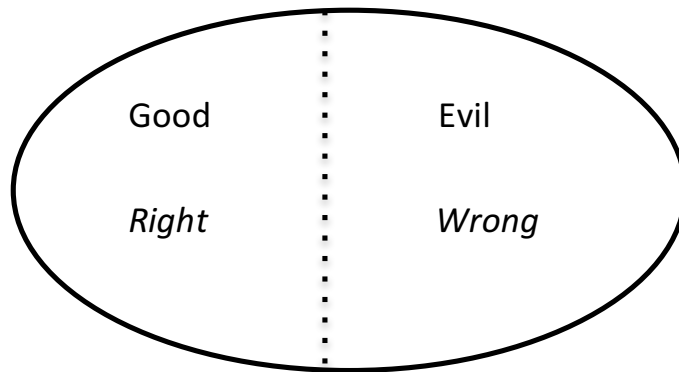
Porn strugglers grow so comfortable with their sin that they lose the ferocious edge needed to win this battle. See Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:27-30.

For the Christian empowered by the Holy Spirit and the Word, only an aggressive disposition against sin is suitable for this battle.

We encourage David to pursue repentance. Picture his conscience as a circle, with a clear and distinct line dividing good from evil, right from wrong.



In his conscience, after repeated exposure to porn, the line becomes fuzzy and less distinct.



An addict gets no help from his conscience because repeated exposures have numbed it. At the same time, his carnal desires run amok.

The antidote to a dulled conscience and selfish desires is a daily habit of quick repentance and consistent obedience.

In confessing his sin to God, the addict cultivates a right fear of God (Psalm 34:11-14) and facilitates a right understanding of who God is according to the Scriptures.

David's consistent pattern of failure made him start accepting lies—like he can't change or God doesn't care about him. We help David by directing him to biblical passages that remind him of spiritual realities. Cf. Philippians 1:6; Romans 6:1-14.

Where too many disciplers go wrong—they myopically focus on fighting sexual sin, and lose sight of faith. *Faith in Christ is the chief goal of Christian discipleship.*

### ***The Circumstance Front***

While the faith front is the *most important*; the circumstance front is the *most urgent*.

We start by asking David to be brutal in cutting off access to pornography. A radical disposition towards his sin should lead to concrete actions.

Boundaries are the barriers that the addict constructs to inhibit his use of porn.

A good rule of thumb for any addict—boundaries need to be built thick enough to *protect the addict from himself*.

Our goal is to build a fortified wall around David's lust-craved heart, so that once we've slowed down the bleeding, the real heart work can be done.

### ***The Self (Internal) Front***

When we find the term "heart" in the Bible, it's describing the core or central part of who we are.

What are David's heart issues? Is there a reckless pursuit of pleasure because he wants to satisfy his sexual cravings? Does he wrestle with the boredom of a pietistic lifestyle—so porn is a way to fill the boredom? Is he looking for some sense of adventure? Is he angry at God for not giving him a girlfriend or a way to satisfy his sexual needs? Is he bitter at his father for not providing accountability early on in the struggle? Is he looking for affirmation or comfort?

We draw out the lies and self-justifications that allow David to downplay the problem and stay stuck in the sin. He is preaching to himself a false gospel.

We ask about David's fantasy life.

As we help David work through his struggle, we see a shift from focus on his *external* battles (like temptations to look lustfully at scantily clad women on a computer screen or a cell phone) to his *internal* world (his heart, mind, thoughts and emotions).

The lack of self-control can show itself not just in his behavior, but now in his internal world, as he spends just as much time pulling images from his brain and fantasizing.

Our desire is to teach the struggler to say “no to ungodliness” (Titus 2:12), especially when it comes to dwelling on images in his mind or making erotic movie reels in his imagination.

We ask David about his identity in Christ.

Doubt is common, as every shameful act causes him to wonder, “Am I really a Christian?”

Every time he looks at pornography, he feeds the sinful flesh, it is never satisfied. The goal is simple— He actively starves his sinful flesh of its access to pornography.

Loving David means helping him to ground his life in Christ. *Sustained gospel contact is essential for their survival.*

The greater David’s sense of love, acceptance and forgiveness in Christ, the more strength he will have to fight his battles.

### ***The People Front***

Rather than taking the burden of David’s struggles on ourselves, we draw other people in.

We help David connect with a person or two for accountability.

Our goal is vulnerability and transparency with a close circle of friends, disciplers and spiritual leaders/pastors.

God’s purposes for a supernatural community are that we share the burdens of our fellow believers. A church is a salvation cooperative.

Biblical accountability must be honest, frequent, local, and tough.

Accountability must be placed in a larger framework of Christian friendship.

Humility is a vital component of this battle (James 3:14; 4:10). The humble will seek help; the prideful will sludge through life on their own.

We assist David by thinking through the three distinctly biblical ways to describe shame—naked and exposed (Genesis 3:7), unclean and defiled (Isaiah 64:6), and outcast and rejected (Genesis 16).