

DISCUSSION LEADER'S GUIDE

PURE
EYES,
CLEAN
HEART

A Couple's Journey to Freedom from Pornography

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*Discussion Leader's Guide, Pure Eyes, Clean Heart: A
Couple's Journey to Freedom from Pornography*

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Dedicated to the members of our first pilot group. You trusted us, taught us, and loved us. Thank you for being real and honest and for bringing your wisdom to everyone who joins in this journey of healing and freedom.

Welcome!

The very first thing we want to say to you is *thank you*.

Thank you for having the courage to lead a group that many people have not even thought about leading. Thank you for creating a space where people can come and not be judged, where each time they speak, the shame surrounding their addiction lessens, where in their darkest hours they can find light and hope.

And the second thing we want you to know? God's got this. You don't have to have everything figured out. Your marriage doesn't have to be perfect.¹ You don't have to have the answer to every possible question. If you're nervous, that's ok. In fact, it's more than okay because it means you know you need Jesus to pull this off.

This is called a guide for a reason. Your group may look very different from our pilot group. In the margins, we have side notes with alternative ideas and solutions to differing scenarios. While we have tried to anticipate what you might need during your seven-week adventure, we know that things might come up that we don't address. But remember—you have God on your side and have access to Him 24/7. Lean on the Holy Spirit. Remember the words of James: "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking" (James 1:5 NLT).

And let us never, ever, ever forget the importance of prayer. You need prayer, your co-leader needs prayer, your family needs prayer, and your participants need prayer. All this prayer means it would be really good for you to have a prayer team that can come around you and your group.

Some things to ask your prayer team to pray for:

- **Protection:** The enemy does not want people to experience freedom OR deepen their relationships with God and godly community. As such, he will try to throw wrenches in your plans. Ask your prayer team to pray for physical and spiritual protection for you (the leaders) and the participants—both for your time together and your time apart.
- **Wisdom:** You're not going to know the answer to every question or have a solution to every problem. Sometimes when really hard things come up, God just asks us to be empathetic and point people to Him, the One who does have answers and solutions to any problem. Sometimes, though, God does want you to answer questions or respond to situations with specific words of guidance. Ask your prayer team to pray you will have wisdom and discernment so you can be a vessel where His voice can flow through you.
- **Openness:** Ask your group to pray that people will be open to whatever God has for them, that they will take the risk to be real. This goes for you, too. As a leader, you

¹ Your marriage certainly doesn't need to be perfect, but it does need to be on strong, solid ground with good communication and mutual love and respect. Both husband and wife need to have an active relationship with Jesus and support around him/her.

might feel like you have to have it all put together. Share as God leads and know that if He asks you to share something hard or embarrassing, there will be fruit from it (even if you can't see it at first).

- **Group Dynamics:** You only have seven weeks together and a lot of material to cover. Ask your prayer team to pray that God will supernaturally develop relationships quickly so that group members will be able to trust and love from the beginning.

We are so excited for how God is moving in small groups, in churches, in friendships, and in marriages. It's people like you who are continuing to fan the flame of hope that porn addiction, while hard and difficult, can be overcome by the One who has overcome it all!

Thank you for journeying with us!

Craig and Jen

P.S. Need more resources? You can connect with us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/Theknotproject and on our websites at www.pureeyescleanheart.com and www.knotproject.org.

Getting Started: Let's Talk Logistics

Here are some things to consider as you plan for your group:

- ❖ **Leadership:** This group requires two facilitators and, ideally, it would be a husband and wife team. Participants glean hope from seeing a couple emerge from the pit of addiction with renewed strength, peace, and joy.
- ❖ **Meeting space:** Our pilot group met at our house, but there are many other options to explore if you don't feel comfortable with hosting in your home. You could use a meeting room at your church, a community room at your local library, or one of the participant's houses if they offer. Another thing to consider is whether or not couples will need childcare. In our case, all of our couples had young children, but they were willing to each get their own sitter since none of the couples lived in close proximity. However, if everyone lives in the same general vicinity, couples might drop their kids off at one participant's house with a shared babysitter and then attend the group at another house. Also, some churches are willing to provide childcare if you are meeting at the church. It might be worth your time to explore that option with your church leadership.
- ❖ **Number of couples:** This might be somewhat determined by the capacity of your meeting space. However, it's good to note that you will discuss much as a whole group and sharing time is vital to this process. The more people you have sharing, either the longer the group will go or the less time people will have to share. Our pilot group consisted of eight people – three couples along with Craig and myself. We found that the further we got along in the study, the more willing participants were to share. What began as a two-hour meeting time expanded to two-and-a-half hours.
- ❖ **Break-out groups consideration:** In our group, the husbands were the ones who struggled with porn addiction. Thus, when we finished the whole-group discussion and broke into two small groups, the husbands met together in one area and the wives met together in another. While it is true females also struggle with pornography, it might be awkward to have mixed genders in these small groups.
- ❖ **Food/drink:** Since we hosted at our home, I had some light refreshments out, usually iced tea and water. Occasionally, we would have a sweet treat as well. Participants also began to bring some things to share, but it was all very informal. At your first gathering, you can ask what participants might like to do for subsequent meetings.
- ❖ **Materials:** We asked the participants to bring their own Bibles, journals, and pens. Couples will also need to purchase a copy of *Pure Eyes, Clean Heart: A Couple's Journey to Freedom from Pornography*. If it's easier (and to save on shipping costs), facilitators may wish to purchase enough books for each couple to have one copy and hand them out at the first meeting, upon which couples can reimburse you. Also, it is a good idea to have some nametags on hand at least for the first few sessions. We also have a new resource you might consider giving each couple as a gift at the conclusion of your

group. We made decks of cards that help spouses pray for one another. Each deck contains 54 cards—52 prayer cards and 2 informational cards, which means one card for each week of the year. Every card has a weekly theme, Scriptures, prayer points, and an intimacy building action. You can find more details and ordering information <http://www.knotproject.org/store/marriage-matters-unlock-the-power-of-prayer>.

- ❖ **Marketing:** Due to the shame surrounding porn addiction, don't be dismayed if you don't have hoards of people responding to your ads in the church bulletin. While it's definitely important to advertise when, where, and why you'll be meeting, don't discount personal invitations. Pray about where you should advertise, but most importantly, pray that God would put people in the path of your advertisements and that He would prepare their hearts for saying "yes" to this group. Since I had spoken both publically and privately about our story, people began to share their stories with me. I went back to one of those couples and asked if they would like to join us in the recovery group. The second couple joined after the wife reached out to me because I had spoken at her church's women's retreat. Her e-mail came at the exact time I was asking God to fill our group! They, in turn, invited their friends who were struggling with porn. This ended up completing our group. The bottom line is this: Prayer is the most powerful "marketing" tool you have.

- ❖ **AV equipment:** There are links to some YouTube videos included in this guide, however, if you do not have AV equipment available, don't stress. They are not crucial to the success of your group. You can always assign them for optional homework.

Week 1:

Prior to the first gathering, let people know what to expect and more about who you are. You'll go more into your story in week 3, but letting them know a little about your struggle is helpful so they know you can relate to their strife. Make sure you reiterate all the logistical details like what to bring, the location of your meeting, times, etc.

We kicked off our group with a potluck dinner at our house. We wanted to have a social event where we all had a chance to get to know each other beyond our struggle with porn. We're in Texas, so the logical choice for us was to cook fajitas and let everyone bring a side, some fixings, and dessert. In our first e-mail to the group (it's super helpful to set up an e-mail group since you'll be e-mailing everyone at least once a week), we asked everyone to choose a few things from a list for our potluck. You could also create a separate evite that has a potluck option, too (i.e. www.Punchbowl.com, www.Evite.com, or www.SignUpGenius.com).

While Craig finished dinner prep, I facilitated introductions, got drinks, and tried to make everyone feel welcome. Those coming to your group may feel embarrassed and ashamed, so anything you can do to put people at ease and keep the conversation flowing will be helpful.

Once we all served our plates, we moved into the dining room. In our case, some of the couples knew each other so conversation flowed relatively easily. But when it started to wane down at times, we had a list of questions ready to go to keep things moving. Here are some sample questions:

- ❖ How long have you lived in the area?
- ❖ What does your family life look like right now? (jobs, kids, pets, etc.)
- ❖ How did the two of you meet?²
- ❖ What does your church life look like?
- ❖ What is the one of the best qualities of your spouse?
- ❖ What are your favorite things to do together as a couple?
- ❖ What is one positive thing you never thought you'd do but you did at the encouragement of your spouse?

Since Week 2 is packed with ideas and questions, it might be nice to ask each person what they hope to get out of this group. This makes for a great segue into what the group will look like going forward.

During dessert, we gave an overview of how our meetings would generally be structured for the remaining six meetings. Our timeline looked like this*:

² We found this to be a powerful question because it took them back to all the reasons why they fell in love with each other in the first place. It also set a positive tone for the dinner and the group as a whole.

Key objective: To get to know each other and establish group norms.

Special Note: *This guide is written with the assumption that you as a couple have struggled with pornography in your marriage. If you have not, make sure you let your group know with what you have struggled so they understand you have come from a place of hardship into a place of freedom and peace.*

6:30–6:45	Welcome & Prayer
6:45–7:45	Whole-Group Discussion
7:45–8:45	Same-gender breakouts (Encouragers & Overcomers)
8:45–9:00	Closing Prayer

Depending on the time frame you have, you can adjust the schedule as needed. If you are trying to get through in Sunday-school hour, you could expand this from a 7-week class to a 13-week class. In this case, one week you would meet as a whole group and the next week in the same-gender breakouts.

Before leaving for the night, we went over some group expectations. Here are some suggested things to cover:

- This group is not a place for competition or comparison. Be mindful when someone is sharing to take captive any thoughts (see 2 Corinthians 10:5) that sound like “I would never do *that!*” or “At least my marriage hasn’t gotten *that* bad.” Thoughts like this hinder our ability to access true compassion and empathy for others.
- Use what people share as information as to how to pray for them. That’s it.
- What is shared in the group must stay in the group. This goes for both whole group and breakout groups.
- Everyone has the right to not respond right away to group questions. Some of us are internal processors and need a little extra time to gather our thoughts. However, we do encourage you to share your thoughts later with your spouse or next time with the group. Also, be aware there is a distinction between needing time to process and fear of shame. This is a safe place to share shameful things and when you bring them out of darkness into the light, there is great opportunity for healing.

Pre-Meeting Checklist:

- Pray
- Send introductory e-mail
- Plan potluck and send evite invitation
- Purchase nametags
- Purchase books for the group (optional)

Post-Meeting Checklist:

- Pray, thanking God for what He did in your meeting.
- Send follow-up e-mail that includes reading schedule (see below).

Reading Schedule

Participants should come to group having read the following chapters:

Week 1: None

Week 2: Chapters 1–3

Week 3: Chapters 4–6

Week 4: Chapters 7–9

Week 5: Chapters 10–12

Week 6: Chapters 13–15

Week 7: Chapters 16–18

* This schedule is based on the reading schedule found in the sidebar. Time spent in groups may need to vary based on the number of participants. If you want participants to answer most the questions, it is recommended for the small group size to be 6–8 participants.

Week 2

Welcome everyone and open in prayer when you're ready to begin.

To kick off this week, we have an optional opening video you can share with your group. You can share it from YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=157&v=eBzgi8_kMg8). It talks about how the book can be helpful for them as they journey through porn addiction.

Whole Group

Key questions/ideas:

- 1) Ask the group: Where do you see Jesus in the midst of porn addiction? As Jen said in the video (above), their freedom (from porn and the need to control) was only possible through their relationship with Jesus. *Allow everyone to answer. After listening to the responses, make sure these points are addressed:*
 - Through a relationship with Jesus, we can recognize:
 - Jesus understands pain and betrayal. He's been through that. His pain was valid and so is yours.
 - We are all sinners in need of forgiveness and grace. God forgives as soon as we ask. Though we are called to forgive others for their sins against us, this is a process that takes time and healing. We need to be able to come to a place where we can understand and know in our hearts that Jesus is trustworthy enough to help us forgive those who hurt us.
 - The definition of sin is "separation from God." God has no hierarchy to distinguish between which sins are worse than others. To God, sin is sin.
 - God sent His Son, Jesus, to die on a cross as a perfect sacrifice for our sins so that through Him we are able to have a full and complete relationship with Him. This grace and forgiveness is completely free and always available and accessible. *(If you have people in your group who do not have a relationship with Jesus, you might invite them to talk with you after the meeting if they want to have that relationship. You can lead them in the sinner's prayer, ask if they have a Bible, etc.)*
- 2) Tackle the concept of **failure**. When you're actively trying to fight against temptation and then you succumb, Satan will try to use your failure to keep you from returning to Jesus, even though Jesus never runs out of grace or forgiveness. Share how you view failure as it relates to your struggle with porn.

Ask the husbands to respond to this question first in the whole group: *What is your relationship with failure?*

Key objective: To open the conversation about their relationship to Jesus; offer hope in the midst of repeated failure.

Next, shift the conversation to the wives. How you view failure will impact how you react to your husband's failure. Share your view of failure and how this shaped your own reactions.

Ask the wives to respond to the same question in the whole group: *What is your relationship with failure?*

Now, compare/contrast how we view and deal with failure with how God has shown himself to view and deal with our failures.

Summarize the story of David found in 2 Samuel 11–12. Make sure you mention these highlights:

- David chose someone else to go to war for him. (*He wasn't doing what he was supposed to be doing.*)
- David had an affair with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his fighters in the war.
- When Bathsheba became pregnant, David devised a scheme to cover up his sin, but when it didn't work, he had her husband, Uriah, killed.
- God sent Nathan to rebuke David and bring him to repentance.
- David's response to this rebuke is found in Psalm 51.

God described David as a man after His own heart. Throughout the Psalms, we see the intimate relationship David had with God. Knowing that he knew God well and that God chose him, we can put stock in David's thoughts about God.

Have participants read Psalm 51 from their Bibles or print out this section of Scripture for them. As they read, ask them to pull from the Scriptures how David and God dealt with David's failure and jot down their thoughts in their Bibles or journal.

As a group, discuss if the way God and David dealt with failure is similar or different from the way they currently view/deal with failure.

- 3) **Conviction vs. Condemnation** (*If you need additional discussion questions*) Look at the chart on page 43 of the book (Conviction vs. Condemnation). This chart is based on the verse from Romans 8:1: "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." This means God will never condemn you because you slipped back into sin. He will, however, send the Holy Spirit to convict you. We need to know when our behavior is causing separation from God (and often from others we love as well). This conviction is the Holy Spirit saying to us: "This behavior does not keep you on the best path I have for you." It's designed to turn us toward our relationship with God, not to cause us to stay in a rut of guilt and shame.

How Craig viewed failure:

Failure was to be avoided at all costs. Growing up, performance was strongly linked to approval. Bad behavior and performance was met with disapproval and, at times, physical discipline. This taught me to avoid activities that could lead to failure or to hide the failure in order to avoid the ensuing disappointment and punishment. At the same time, I viewed God in the same light as my earthly father, which led me to fear and avoid Him instead of engaging with Him and fully embracing His grace and mercy.

How Jen viewed failure:

My relationship with failure was that it was to be avoided at all costs, too, and for similar reasons to Craig's. My reaction, though, was much different. I would do everything in my power to keep from failure, pushing myself continually until I found success. If I didn't, I would feel as though I was lazy or not trying hard enough. In addition, I closely tied my success into my worth, assuming that if I failed, God would withhold His love from. Naturally, when I saw Craig continually failing in his battle against temptation, I assumed it was because he wasn't trying hard enough. Because I didn't understand God's grace for me, it was very hard for me to give real grace to Craig.

The chart shows the difference between convicting words of the Holy Spirit and condemning words Satan uses to keep us stuck in the guilt/shame rut. Which of these words have you heard in your head (either from Satan, the Holy Spirit, or your own voice)? Are there any you would add to this chart? If you are a spouse of someone who struggles with porn, is there an area of your life where you feel convicted or condemned? (If you don't have anyone volunteer to share, consider sharing examples from your own life.)

As the conversation winds down, announce that it's time to split into our same-gender breakouts.

Breakout Questions (Chapters 1–3)

In this section of the small group meeting, the spouses struggling with the addiction will meet together (Overcomers) and those hurting because of their spouse's addiction will meet together (Encouragers).

Encourager²Encourager Small-Group Discussion Questions

Other ideas for group name for the spouse helping the addict: Woman²Woman, Pure Eyes

1. What are some of the misconceptions you've had about pornography? Marriage? Sex?
2. How did you first come to know that porn is an issue for your spouse?
3. How have you dealt with porn in your marriage thus far? Do you see yourself more as an encourager or an accuser in your relationship with your husband?
4. Discuss the concepts of "control" and "surrender." In which aspects of your life do you find yourself trying to control? In which aspects have you practiced surrendering?

Overcomer²Overcomer Small-Group Discussion Questions

Other ideas for group name for those facing addiction: Man²Man, Clean Heart

1. How do you think your family dynamics or culture as you were growing up influenced your relationship with pornography?
2. How has pornography shaped your view of women? Sex? Marriage?
3. What role does pornography play in your life? Is it a comfort in times of sadness or depression? Is it a means of escape when real life seems to be too much? Is it a release when stress is unbearable? Something else?
4. How has pornography affected your wife and your relationship with her?

After both groups finish, come back together as a whole group to discuss optional homework (see below) and close in prayer.

Optional Homework

Option 1:

Time Management

It is very possible you won't have time to cover all of this material. Listening to the Holy Spirit and the flow of conversation will help guide you as to what to cover. In our pilot group, we actually assigned the Psalm 51 activity for homework so we could get to the "Conviction vs. Condemnation" section.

Break-Out Group Locations

Since we met at our house, the guys ended up hanging out in the living room and the women moved to the next room, sitting around the kitchen table. If your groups are not able to see/hear each other in your meeting space, make sure you take along a cell phone or have some way to connect with your co-leader since it's unlikely both groups will finish at exactly the same time.

Unconfessed sin and fear of failure can cause great anxiety within us. This anxiety can manifest itself in three major ways (as researched by Karen Horney): moving toward people, moving against people, and moving away from people. Give each couple copies of the information found here and ask them to discuss together how they handle extreme anxiety. They can discern:

- How do I react to anxiety in my own life?
- How do I see my spouse reacting to anxiety?
- How can this information help us to help each other?

Links to articles:

- http://changingminds.org/explanations/needs/horney_needs.htm
- http://www.zeepeedia.com/read.php?adjustment_to_basic_anxiety_moving_towards_people_moving_against_people_personality_psychology&b=94&c=12

Option 2:

Memory verse challenge! Memorizing Scripture is a great way to help us internalize what is truth and “unlearn” things that are not scripturally true. Memorize these two Scriptures this week: Proverbs 28:13 and Psalm 73:26.

Closing

Pray together as a whole group. If you have time, you can also ask people to share any prayer requests they may have. If you do not have time to take prayer requests, you can send out an e-mail and ask them to respond to you. Compile everyone's requests into one e-mail and distribute to the group.

Week 3

Welcome everyone and open in prayer when you're ready to begin.

Whole Group

Key questions/ideas:

- 1) **Sharing Stories:** Now that people are feeling more comfortable with each other (and you with them), it is an excellent time to share your own journey with porn addiction and how it has impacted your marriage. In order to be able to share and have time for the whole-group discussion, it's generally good to keep your testimony time to approximately 15 minutes.

After you have shared, extend the invitation to the other couples to share their stories over the remaining few weeks. Since we had three couples, one couple shared at each remaining week during the study. If you have more than this, you can either start sharing earlier (for example, give your testimony at the welcome dinner) or have two couples share on the same week, limiting their sharing to around ten minutes each. If they seem hesitant, James 5:16 is a great verse to use as encouragement:

"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results."

There is much power in confessing our sins and struggles. Sharing considerably helps the healing process for both the overcomer and the encourager. It is also beneficial for couples to hear how other people have dealt with the situation thus far. Oftentimes, they are able to find validation of their own feelings and realize that their spouse's reactions and feelings are valid as well, as they listen to the perspectives of others.

- 2) **The Meaning of Marriage**
 - a. Briefly, have each couple share what they thought marriage was about when they first got married.
 - b. Has this ideal changed? If so, how?
 - c. How do you view marriage now? What influenced this new view?
 - d. Read aloud Ephesians 5:21-33
 - i. Discuss the perspective given by the author of this article: <http://discovertheword.org/?p=1578>
How does this relate to Matthew 19:5-6 (MSG)⁴?

Key objective:

Begin the discussion on how God designed marriage to work and what it means for two people to be joined into one.

A "Thank you for Sharing"

In our group, it was incredibly powerful to pray over the couple who shared after they gave their testimony. As the facilitator, you can pray for them, or you can open up the prayer time for the whole group. Sometimes our enemy, Satan, attacks after we have done something that moves us further along in the healing process. Prayer is a great way to "beef up" protection.

For further study

The link provided in 2.d.i has a podcast that delves more deeply into what it means for two people to become one and some great insight into sex. It would be worth listening to before your meeting this week. You might consider sending the link to the group after this week's meeting.

⁴ It might be helpful to make copies of this article so each couple has one to reference.

- ii. What does submitting to each other look like in your marriage today?
- iii. How do you think the modern idea of submission differs from the biblical idea of submission?
- iv. What new things did you learn about your spouse when you answered the love and respect questions in chapter 6 of the book?

Breakout Questions (Chapters 4–6)

Encourager² Encourager Small-Group Discussion Questions

1. Have you felt like you have been competing (or should compete) with the porn stars? In what ways have you done this or thought about doing it?
2. How has both your husband's addiction and the media influenced your self-image?
3. Pornography is a "hole-filler." What have you used to fill the void that only Jesus can truly fill (see John 4:13)? Jen talked about how she used food. What have you turned to when you feel stressed, anxious, and empty? How does recognizing that you have turned to "hole-fillers" allow you to access compassion for your husband?
4. How has your husband's porn addiction affected your feelings of respect towards him? How has it affected your feeling loved by him?

Optional activity

This activity may seem awkward while you are doing it, but women whose husbands are addicted to porn usually suffer damage to their self-image. They are so used to comparing themselves to false ideals that they forget the majesty of their creation. In addition, words have power (God made the whole earth by using HIS WORDS), especially Scripture! Saying Scripture out loud is a great habit to get into, as well.

Have this paraphrase of Psalm 139:13–17 written on an index card for each woman in the group:

"_____, God made all the delicate, inner parts of you. He knit you together in your mother's womb. Praise you, God, for making her wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous! You watched her as she was woven together in the dark. You saw her before she was born. How precious are your thoughts about her, O God. They cannot be numbered, for they outnumber the grains of sand" (Adapted from Psalm 139:13–17).

Give each woman an index card and have her write the name of the person sitting on her right in the blank. (If it is a larger group, you can partner the women up and have them write each other's names in the blanks.) Looking the woman whose name is on the card in the eyes as much as possible, read the card to her. Go around until everyone has had this truth spoken over her. Then, have

the women turn the card over and write the adapted verse on the back, placing her name in the blank and changing the "you" and "her" to "me" and "your" to "my." Instruct them to hang this on the bathroom mirror or somewhere else where they will see it regularly.

Overcomer2Overcomer Small-Group Discussion Questions

1. "We have allowed ourselves to be duped, distracted, and diverted from what truly satisfies" (Page 61). Do you believe there is truth to this statement? If so, how has this played out in your life? What have you possibly missed out on because of your porn use?
2. Of the 4 delusions Craig once believed, which one strikes a chord with you the most? How do these delusions play out in your life?
3. Do you have a relationship with Jesus? Describe it to your group. Do you believe that He can help set you free from porn addiction? Why or why not?
4. Describe how loving your wife displays the love you have for yourself.

Closing

Come back together as a whole group and pray together. Determine which couple(s) will be sharing their story the next week. If you have time, you can also ask people to share any prayer requests they may have. If you do not have time to take prayer requests, you can send out an e-mail and ask them to respond to you. Compile everyone's requests into one e-mail and distribute to the group.

Week 4

Welcome everyone and open in prayer when you're ready to begin.

Whole Group

Key questions/ideas:

1. Sharing Stories (Pre-determined couple shares their story.)
2. After you've thanked the couple for sharing and/or prayed for them, begin a conversation about the "House" analogy. Be clear that this metaphor works for all of us—not just those addicted to porn. The house is a metaphor for our hearts. Just like our real houses, our heart homes have many rooms. These rooms represent past memories, wounds, victories, experiences, etc. When we invite Jesus into our hearts, we invite Him into our "homes." But a lot of us compartmentalize, restricting Him to one room. We invite Him into the room we think He wants to see or where we feel like we are ready to experience His healing. He longs, though, to be invited into every room. However, Jesus is a gentleman and won't force himself through the doors uninvited. But He will stand at the door and knock because He wants all of us (see Revelation 3:20). He wants to move us from the places where we've tried to hide or those we've become complacent about and bring them into the light of His presence. When we invite Him into those previously closed rooms, we allow His healing to take place and we move toward the wholeness He desires for us.
3. Oftentimes, we don't want to open the door because we are afraid. Ask the group: "What is your greatest fear surrounding porn addiction?" Give each person an index card to write down his/her fear. (These will be read anonymously, so instruct them not to write their name on the card.)
4. Before reading the cards aloud, pray that Satan would not gain a foothold with new fears. Then, both of you share what your biggest fears were/are surrounding porn addiction.
5. Read participants' cards aloud.
6. What reactions play out in your marriage that are the result of these fears?
7. Discuss what God says about fear. You can reference some of the verses in the sidebar. What would giving your fears to God look like in your personal walk with Jesus?
8. Share how you and your spouse have walked through your own fears and how you were able to relinquish them to God.

Optional Homework

Spend time with God this week. Ask Him to show you the doors Jesus wants you to open to Him.

Key objective: To discover what parts of their lives they have closed off to Jesus and to confront the fears surrounding those things they try to keep from God.

Bible verse about fear

- Joshua 1:9
- John 14:27
- Isaiah 43:1
- Psalm 23:4
- Psalm 94:19
- Psalm 27:1
- 1 Peter 5:6-7
- 2 Timothy 1:7
- 1 John 4:18

This is definitely not an exhaustive list, but one that will get you started.

Encourager²Encourager Small-Group Discussion Questions

1. Do you feel responsible for keeping your spouse from porn? Do you find yourself using controlling words or behaviors in your conversations with him? How does he normally respond?
2. Do you find you have some of the same fears Jen listed in chapter 7? Do you have any she doesn't mention? Which of your spouse's behaviors trigger your fear? (This question leads to the index card activity. See below.)
3. How can you communicate effectively with your spouse about your fears? (If you're doing the optional activity, save this question until you are working on the index cards.)
4. How could you reframe some of your ideas/thoughts/questions about your spouse and his addiction when you are speaking with him so they are loving and respectful? (Answer this question if not doing the index card activity.)

Optional activity

Bring in some index cards. Have each woman in the group choose one of her husband's behaviors that rubs her the wrong way. Then, have her come up with a statement that communicates how she feels, while at the same time being respectful towards her husband.

For example:

I hate it when he's continually on video games. I often complain and nag him about this.

I can communicate how this behavior affects me by saying, "When you _____, I feel _____ because I think I am _____."

Ask them to have a conversation with their husbands about what they have written on the notecards sometime in the coming week.

Overcomer²Overcomer Small-Group Discussion Questions

1. Do you find that your wife exhibits controlling behaviors, especially in regard to your porn addiction? When she is controlling, what is your reaction?
2. Are there rules or boundaries you and your spouse have put in place to help you with your addiction? What is your attitude toward them?
3. Do you feel comfortable sharing with your wife how you are really coping with the addiction?
4. Is there anything you wish you could change about how your wife communicates with you?

Optional activity

Bring in some index cards. Have each man in the group write down some phrases his wife says that really rub him the wrong way. Then, have him come

up with a statement that communicates how he feels, while at the same time being loving toward his wife.

For example:

I don't like it when my wife says, "You don't need to be watching that show on TV!"

I can communicate this by saying, "When you _____, I feel _____ because I think I am _____."

Ask them to have a conversation with their wives about what they have written on the notecards sometime in the coming week.

Closing

Come back together as a whole group and pray together. Determine which couple(s) will be sharing their story the next week. If you have time, you can also ask people to share any prayer requests they may have. If you do not have time to take prayer requests, you can send out an e-mail and ask them to respond to you. Compile everyone's requests into one e-mail and distribute to the group.

Week 5

Welcome everyone and open in prayer when you're ready to begin.

Whole Group

Key questions/ideas:

1. Sharing Stories (Pre-determined couple shares their story.)
2. After you've thanked the couple for sharing and/or prayed for them, begin this conversation: What words come to mind when you think of the word *intimacy*? (Participants can "popcorn" answers out as ideas come to them.)
3. Prior to your relationship with your spouse, what examples of intimacy did you have? Think about your parents, extended family, friends, etc.
4. As a group, create a working definition of *intimacy*.
5. It is helpful if you (facilitators) share some of the barriers to intimacy you've experienced as a couple (you don't need to limit this to the porn addiction, although that is definitely an intimacy destroyer). Ask couples to share some of their own barriers.
6. Next, share some of the things that helped create an intimate bond between you as a couple. Then, ask participants to share what would enable them to move toward each other in an intimate relationship. Ask them to phrase this in a positive format, such as, "*I would feel more connected to you if we _____*" instead of a negative format, such as, "*Since you don't _____, I don't feel connected.*"

Optional Homework

(You may also use these articles to help you prepare for the whole group discussion.)

Read these articles and discuss any revelations/ideas with your spouse:

- Focus on the Family: <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/preparing-for-marriage/what-it-means-to-be-intimate/what-it-means-to-be-intimate>
- Crosswalk: <http://www.crosswalk.com/family/marriage/seven-ways-to-develop-emotional-intimacy-in-your-marriage-11642928.html>
- Family Life: <http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/staying-married/growing-spiritually/developing-spiritual-intimacy-in-marriage>

Encourager2Encourager Small-Group Discussion Questions

1. What (if any) has confession looked like in your marriage regarding porn use?
2. What impact has the revelation of truth had on your marriage? How have you reacted to the confession? (If your spouse has never confessed, what impact do you think this confession would have on you?)
3. Talk about the role of anger in your life. How have you typically dealt with it in general? How do you display your anger in your marriage?

Key objective:

To discover what true intimacy is and how to work toward developing a deeper connection with our spouse.

Optional activity

Play Francesca Battistelli's song "If We're Honest" via audio or YouTube video.

4. Do you believe that it is beneficial for you when you forgive your spouse? In other words, do you believe that your forgiveness is not just for the other person, but benefits you as well?

Overcomer2Overcomer Small-Group Discussion Questions

1. Do you hide from God? Do you believe that He is not ashamed of your temptations, thoughts, and actions, but wants to help you? Why or why not?
2. Have you confessed your porn use to God? To your spouse? If so, what has been the outcome?
3. Are you able to be emotionally intimate with your spouse? What hurdles do you feel you have to overcome in order to become more emotionally intimate with your spouse?

Closing

Come back together as a whole group and pray together. Determine which couple(s) will be sharing their story the next week. If you have time, you can also ask people to share any prayer requests they may have. If you do not have time to take prayer requests, you can send out an e-mail and ask them to respond to you. Compile everyone's requests into one e-mail and distribute to the group.

Week 6

Welcome everyone and open in prayer when you're ready to begin.

This week, we inverted the schedule. After the opening prayer and "sharing stories" time, divide up into your Overcomers and Encouragers groups first. You'll come back to do your whole-group discussion after you finish in these groups. In your small groups, you'll complete the "Wheel of Life." The main point of this exercise is to help the group members determine where there may be imbalance in their lives. When our lives are not in balance, they do not operate smoothly, making for a bumpy ride. This not only affects us as individuals, but potentially all the people we encounter. The object in this lesson is not that we hit 10s in every area, but to have a balanced wheel. You can find printables and further instructions here:

<https://www.thecoachingtoolscompany.com/products/wheel-of-life-coaching-tool/>. Feel free to adapt as you see fit for your group.

Encourager2Encourager Small-Group Discussion Questions

1. Individually, complete your "Wheel of Life" on the handout.
2. Looking at your Wheels (do not feel as though everyone has to answer each of these questions):
 - a. Are there any surprises for you?
 - b. How do you feel about your life as you look at your Wheel?
 - c. Which of these elements would you most like to improve?
 - d. What are some things that easily throw you off balance?
 - e. How could you make space for these changes?
 - f. Can you effect the necessary changes on your own? What help and cooperation from others might you need?
3. How does your balance or imbalance affect how you handle your spouse's porn addiction? What differences do you notice in your reactions and interactions with your spouse when you are in balance? Off balance?
4. What kinds of things does your husband do or say that might indicate he is off balance and could be more tempted to engage in non-fruitful behavior?

Overcomer2Overcomer Small-Group Discussion Questions

1. Individually, complete your "Wheel of Life" on the handout.
2. Looking at your Wheels (do not feel as though everyone has to answer each of these questions):
 - a. Are there any surprises for you?
 - b. How do you feel about your life as you look at your Wheel?
 - c. Which of these elements would you most like to improve?
 - d. What are some things that easily throw you off balance?
 - e. How could you make space for these changes?
 - f. Can you effect the necessary changes on your own? What help and cooperation from others might you need?

Key Objective:

To recognize that an unbalanced life can lead to an unbalanced marriage and over all unbalanced emotional health.

3. How does your balance or imbalance affect how you handle your porn addiction? What differences do you notice in your relationship with your spouse and with God when you are in balance? Off balance?
4. What kinds of things does your wife do or say that might indicate she is off balance and could be more tempted to engage in non-fruitful behavior?

Whole Group

Key questions/ideas:

1. If God designed us to complement each other and be a team, it stands to reason that we are also designed to help keep each other in balance. If one part of the team isn't functioning well, the whole team suffers. In order to help each other, we want to be able to recognize when our spouse is off-kilter. Sometimes we can help return the balance, but sometimes our only job is to simply point out what seems off and let God do the rest of the work. Have you been able to recognize when your spouse is off-balance? If so, how do you bring this to his/her attention? What is your motivation in doing so?
2. The "Wheel of Life" is a secular coaching tool. In our small groups, we talked about what we'd like to change and how we could change things. But the truth is, there are some things that God alone can change and all we have to do is let Him move into those spaces of our lives. But in order for Him to truly change us, we have to allow Him to have His way with us. This might mean showing us past hurts, unconfessed sin, or lies we believe. Share an example from your own lives. (See sidebar for Jen's example.)
3. Pause for prayer. Leaders will pray and ask the Holy Spirit to begin revealing to us any parts of our lives that are off balance due to a wound in our hearts, or, if we already know the wound, how He longs to heal it. After a time of silence and prayer, ask participants to share what has been revealed to them, as they are able.

Homework (We're not calling this one "Optional")

Discuss with your spouse your "Wheel of Life." How does imbalance contribute to turning to self-medicating habits? Is there anything you can tangibly do to bring more balance to each other's lives? Are there any behaviors you notice in each other that indicate you're falling out of balance? What would be helpful to hear when your spouse notices this in you? What would not be helpful?

Closing

Pray together as a whole group. Determine which couple(s) will be sharing their story the next week. If you have time, you can also ask people to share any prayer requests they may have. If you do not have time to take prayer requests, you can send out an e-mail and ask them to respond to you. Compile everyone's requests into one e-mail and distribute to the group.

How Jen's wounds kept her off balance

Because productivity and achievement were highly valued in my family, it became very hard for me to rest and allow time for fun. This led to daily exhaustion and repeated burnouts. God had to show me that my value is not in what I do, but in who I am (a child of God). Once I allowed this to truly sink into my heart, I was able to add more rest and fun to my life, bringing balance and peace.

Week 7

Welcome everyone and open in prayer when you're ready to begin.

Whole Group

Key questions/ideas:

1. Sharing Stories (Pre-determined couple shares their story.)
2. Where have you seen God grow you during the past 7 weeks? How have you seen your spouse grow?
3. Facilitators share how they've managed life "after" porn addiction.
 - a. Maintain Connection: "When you want to shut down, reach out."
 - i. Share how both of you feel loved (this idea is based on Gary Chapman's book, *The Five Love Languages*) and when you feel most connected to each other.
 1. Craig: Validation and compassion (words of affirmation)
 2. Jen: Sharing the good and the bad (quality time)
 - ii. Have each couple turn and face each other. Then ask them to discuss their answers to this question: *How or when do you feel most connected to your spouse?* When they are finished discussing, ask them to give you a thumbs up (or other kind of signal) so you know they are ready to move on.
 - b. Know Yourself: Understand the difference between your true and false self. If we can recognize in ourselves (and in our partners) when we are operating out of our false selves, we can begin to have conversations about what is leading us to make certain decisions. There are many aspects to our true and false selves. Give one example of how you know when you are being real and what you do when you are hiding.
 - i. True self: What brings you life
 1. Craig: Being a prankster
 2. Jen: Being compassionate and creative
 - ii. False self: Image you project as part of self-protection (think of this as the proverbial "fig leaf")
 1. Craig: Self-reliance
 2. Jen: Busyness
 - iii. Question for couples: What are the aspects of your true and false selves? (*Feel free to come up with these together.*)
 - c. Commit to Honesty
 - i. Recognize that it takes hard work and time to rebuild trust.
 1. Jen: For Craig to reach out when he was feeling tempted, either to her or to his friends.
 - ii. Recognize that it takes space in order to rebuild that trust (i.e. we can't be hovering, controlling, and trying to manipulate events in order to keep our spouses "safe").

Key Objective:

To equip couples with sustainable ideas to continue growing in their relationship with each other and with God.

Before this meeting:

Email the first whole-group question. This gives couples time to reflect on the changes they have seen within themselves and their partners over the past 7 weeks.

Sharing About Life "After" Porn

Our group wanted to know what our lives have looked like since we started living free from addiction. As such, we need to be aware and continually working with God and each other to stay in the place of freedom He offers. In this section, we have laid out how we have stayed in that spot of freedom and how we've dealt with reappearances of porn. If you choose to teach from these bullet points, inserting your own stories is extremely helpful for your participants. This gives them points of reference for when they turn to each other and answer these questions. We've included some of our answers here to give you food for thought.

1. Craig: No nagging, allow for time alone or with friends. Asking in constructive ways how he handled being alone.
- iii. Question for couples: *What does earning back trust look like for both of you? What is one thing you can do to rebuild trust?*
- d. Perceive with God's Eyes and Ears
 - i. Discuss the power of prayer in your own marriage.
 - ii. Discuss how we can perceive things one way, but when we ask God to show us His perception, we can have deeper and clearer understanding of what is really going on. For example, instead of dismissing each other's bad moods (especially if they seem to be long-lasting) or getting angry about them, Craig and I have learned to see beyond the surface. We seek to help our spouse uncover what is really going on, asking God to illuminate what we cannot see.
 - iii. If you are giving the prayer cards as a gift to your participants, now would be a great time to present them. You're equipping them with a tangible tool to help them continue to grow closer to God and to each other.

Encourager² Encourager Small-Group Discussion Questions

1. What support do you need right now? What are some resources you can use or ways you can go about getting that support? (Brainstorm ideas in the group.)
2. What are some of the "stones" that make up your altar? (Reference from chapter 18 of the book.)

Overcomer² Overcomer Small-Group Discussion Questions

1. Where are you in your recovery right now? What is working or not working in your fight against porn addiction?
2. What are some of the "stones" that make up your altar? (Reference from chapter 18 of the book.)

Closing

Come back together as a whole group and pray together. At this closing, Craig and I chose to pray over each couple. We sat them where everyone could gather around them and put their hands on them. Craig would open the prayer and I would close it, allowing time for other couples to pray as well.

A Sweet Thing...

After we had prayed for each couple, they asked if they could pray for us. It was such a blessing and so needed! We all need people who will rally around us and pray for us, no matter what season of life we are in! If your participants offer this to you, we highly encourage you to take them up on it!

After it's over, is it really over?

You might feel really tired right now. There is so much energy and work that goes into leading small groups! But you have impacted your participants' lives. You have been authentic and played a pivotal role in helping to lift shame and allow light into places that have been covered in darkness.

We are so grateful for you. Thank you for doing this hard work. Thank you for your passion for marriages, for wholeness, for Jesus. Thank you for the creativity that you have brought to this group because we know that you may have faced challenges that were not covered in this guide. We know you had to lean into the Holy Spirit, seeking Him earnestly for how to best serve your group.

Well done, good and faithful servant.

You may find that your participants might want to continue on in some way. They may feel afraid of leaving the group. Our encouragement to you is for you as a couple to ask God in what capacity you can serve them in a way that feels easy and light.

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." Matthew 11:28-30

Here are some ideas:

- ❖ **Have a monthly-ish gathering.** You could rotate houses, have a potluck, go out to dinner. We had a potluck gathering at one of the participant's houses. It was more of a social occasion because all the kids were there (all 10 of them!). It was good to see each other, but we realized afterwards that what we all really wanted was space to share what was really going on in our lives on a deeper level. For our next gathering, we plan to hire a babysitter to keep the kids upstairs. We will have both whole-group time and our Overcomers/Encouragers breakout time.
- ❖ **Set up group texts.** Craig and the guys have a texting thread going and I have one with the girls. This is super useful for sharing prayer requests and an easy way to reach out in time of need.
- ❖ **Be available.** If one of your participants calls you up and wants to meet for coffee (meet only with your gender), be as available as you can.
- ❖ **Send out encouraging e-mails.** Craig and I came up with some check-in questions the couples could use to keep connected on a weekly basis. Feel free to use this:

Weekly check-in questions to use with your spouse:

- 1) How have you made time for God this week?
- 2) How have you seen God moving?
- 3) What has He been saying to you?
- 4) How have you shown love to your spouse this week? How have you received love from your spouse? Give specific examples.

Start out small. Try to have 3–4 days of some quiet time. Then, schedule one evening out (or talk after the kids go to bed) to discuss these questions.

No matter how you decide to serve further (if at all), know that you're not in charge of rescuing anyone. That's God's job. Trust His leading.