



A TALKING POINTS BOOK BY
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THE PORN PROBLEM


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The Porn Problem

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Published by

The Good Book Company

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ISBN: 9781784981976 | Printed in the UK by CPI

Design by André Parker

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INTRODUCTION

TALKING POINTS

The world is changing. Fast.

And not just politics, technology and communication, but our whole culture, morality and attitudes. Christians living in Western culture have enjoyed the benefit of being in a world which largely shared our assumptions about what is fundamentally right and wrong. We can no longer assume that this is the case.

In two short generations we have moved to a widespread adoption of liberal values, many of which are in conflict with the teaching of the Bible. Increasingly, believers are finding themselves to be the misunderstood minority, and feeling at odds with where the world seems to be heading.

But let's not be blinkered: some of this change has been good. Christians have often failed to discern the difference between our own cultural values, and those that are demanded by scripture. We are as prone to bigotry as others. We have much to repent of in our attitudes towards, for example, the freedom and role of women in society, and our lack

of compassion and understanding towards those who have wrestled with same-sex attraction.

But increasingly we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory and ill-equipped to deal with it. Sometimes it's easier to protest and rage against the tide of history than to go back to our Bibles and think carefully about what God is saying—holding up society's views, and our own, to the truth-revealing mirror that is God's word.

At our best, we Christians have been in the forefront of social reform. Think of the great nineteenth-century reformers of the slave trade, prisons and poverty: William Wilberforce, Elizabeth Fry, and Lord Shaftesbury. But too often, we now find ourselves on the back foot, unable to articulate a clear response to a pressing question of our day. And even when we have understood God's mind on a particular issue, we have struggled to apply it compassionately in our speech and in our relationships.

Christians are called to be wise and gentle, even when the temptation is to call out injustices and feel righteous anger. The way to approach these issues is prayerfully and to be humbly aiming to understand the culture and discern the times.

This short series of books is an attempt to help ordinary Christians start to think constructively about a range of issues—moral, ethical and cultural—that run against the grain for those

who name Christ as Lord. They are an attempt to stimulate believers to start talking with each other as we search the Scriptures together. Their aim is to help us think biblically, constructively and compassionately, and not to feel intimidated when we are challenged or questioned, or, perhaps worse, remain silent. This book aims to lend perspective and to offer some biblical guidance on following God and loving people as God loves us

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT...

In such a short book, we cannot hope to answer all the questions you may have about how to think about pornography—it is a complex and multifaceted issue. Nor can we address the many practical challenges you may be facing with your family or friends, or personally.

Nor have we attempted to present a thorough treatment of all the Bible has to say on these questions. If that is what you are hungry for, there are other, longer books that will help you dig deeper. You will find a list of suggestions in the further resources section at the end.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS...

Rather, our aim is to give you an accessible introduction to the many questions that surround the issue

of pornography, and a starting point for constructive discussion between Christian believers and others. We aim to give you a cultural briefing on where we are with this question, and some pointers on how Christians should think, talk and act.

But we also hope that reading this book will take you beyond the issue—to a genuine compassion and love for those who are caught up in some way with pornography; and to how we might help them see both the dangers, and how they might find help and freedom. We're also aware that this book touches on something that is deeply personal to you. Whatever your situation, our prayer is that this book will be a first step towards understanding the landscape, and an encouragement to know and share the love, hope and freedom we have in Christ.

Tim Thornborough

Series Editor | January 2018

pornography

[poor-*nog*-ra-fee]

noun: **pornography**

printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement.

synonyms: erotica, pornographic material, pornographic, soft-core pornography, dirty books, smut, filth, vice; *informal* porn, hard porn, soft porn, porno, skin/girlie magazines

[Source: Google definitions]

Porn doesn't play games, porn doesn't text back, porn ... gives you exactly what you ask for. I love you porn! I love the always happy endings in porn.

A selection of tweets on pornography

There is no dignity when the human dimension is eliminated from the person. In short, the problem with pornography is not that it shows too much of the person, but that it shows far too little.” **Pope John Paul II**

Religious people use 10% more pornography than secular people. All that religious preaching does no good.

Darrel Ray, psychologist and atheist activist

No one shuts their laptop after looking at pornography and says, “What a productive time I just spent connecting with the world!” **Russell Brand, comedian**

Pornography, to me, represents freedom.

Jenna Jamieson, porn star

*You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. **Matthew 5 v 27-29***

*Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin ... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” **John 8 v 34, 36***

THE PORN PROBLEM

CHAPTER ONE

There has always been pornography of some kind or another—erotic depictions in art, sculpture and on pottery have been discovered in virtually every ancient culture. In some cultures and eras, its availability, acceptability and use have been widespread. At other times, it has been repressed, legislated against and driven underground. But something very dramatic has happened in the last 20 years or so. We've seen a monumental explosion of porn, sparked by the “triple-A engine” of cyber sex: *Accessibility, Affordability* and *Anonymity*.¹

When I was a teenager, if you wanted to get hold of porn you had to risk the embarrassment of being seen reaching for the shelf on the magazine rack that

1 Al Cooper, *Cybersex: The Dark Side of the Force* (Brunner-Routledge, 2000), p 2.

was probably too high for you anyway. And you'd have to dig into your pocket and pay some real money. What a difference today! There is complete anonymity. In the privacy of your own home, wherever you have your laptop or phone, there is porn on demand, free to view.

And vast numbers of people are consuming it. The highly respected Nielsen Media Research organisation reported that about 60 million people—over a quarter of internet users in the United States—visited a pornographic website during one month in 2010.² In case you believe the myth that it's almost exclusively men who look at porn, it's worth noting that the same group revealed in one study that a third of visitors to porn sites are female.³

Online images are far from the only expression of porn. Erotic fiction is readily available, on the internet and in print. This has now entered the mainstream, as seen by the extraordinary success of the novel *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which by June 2015 had sold 125 million copies in just four years. Verbal descriptions, along with the images we see,

2 Quoted in Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex* (Brazos Press, 2015), p 104.

3 Helen Thorne, *Purity is Possible* (The Good Book Company, 2014), p 7.

combine to feed fantasies we create for ourselves. Sometimes the most powerful porn is stuff we create in our own heads.

GETTING THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

If you are someone who takes Jesus seriously, you will already suspect that viewing and reading porn, or manufacturing it ourselves in our imaginations, is something that does not fit with his teaching. He said, “I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5 v 28).

But it’s not just Christians who are worried about the tsunami of porn that has hit our society in recent years. Social commentators, medical professionals and concerned individuals point to the negative impact it is having, for example, on body image, relational health and the development of adolescent sexuality. Only time will tell what the full effect will be. One writer comments:

I would not be surprised if we're evolving to be a less intimate culture. Maybe it won't matter if some people struggle with intimacy and connection, because they'll have robotic devices to meet their needs ... what all this is going to mean in twenty years from now, we have no idea. We are in an evolutionary phase. Some

*of us will survive and thrive in this new environment we've created and some of us won't. It is the greatest social experiment we have ever experienced.*⁴

CLOSER TO HOME

I know that many who read these words won't need convincing that porn is wrong. It may be that you're a Christian who loves Jesus Christ, wants to live to please him and knows that should include keeping your heart sexually pure, but you're very conscious you haven't done that. You're not alone—that's true of all of us, including me. I am a sexual sinner writing to sexual sinners. Exactly how we have fallen short sexually will vary. Not all who read this book will have a problem with porn, but many certainly will—perhaps including you.

Porn use is usually private and therefore hidden from others. That can lead to a deep sense of shame and guilt, which leaves many people feeling alone and isolated. Perhaps you can identify with that. You feel bad about what you have done and what you keep doing, but you don't feel able to talk about it with others. And you may not even feel you can be

⁴ Interview with Robert Weiss, co-author of *Always Turned On: Facing Sexual Addiction in the Digital Age* (Gentle Path Press, 2015), in *The Sunday Times* 8 February 2015.

real with God, so there is also a damaging distance in your relationship with him.

This shame affects both sexes, but can be a particular problem for women. If porn, sexual fantasy and masturbation are ever mentioned in church circles—and all too often they aren't—it is frequently assumed that they are only an issue for men. That leaves the many women who face this battle even more inclined to keep it to themselves. Married people can also be especially affected, because of the mistaken belief that it is mainly singles who view porn. As a result they can be too ashamed to let anyone know about their struggle.

Private shame so often leads to private despair. It may be that as you read these words you have already lost hope. You know that sexual sin has got a grip on you, but you feel powerless to shake it off. I'm speaking especially about pornography, but the principles apply beyond pornography to all types of sexual sin, or indeed to sin of any kind. You've tried hundreds or thousands of times to stop and you haven't been able to, so you may even have given up trying.

If we are to help Christians who feel held by the grip of porn, we must begin by seeking to change the culture of our churches. We need to speak more openly about these issues and encourage those who struggle to be honest with trusted friends or pastors. They can then be pointed away from the darkness

and lies that hold them captive towards the light and truth of Christ that can set them free.

The Bible has wonderful news for those who are beginning to feel they will never find victory in the fight against porn. The gospel of Jesus Christ offers complete forgiveness and also a new power by the Holy Spirit to enable us to fight sin and grow in holiness. It really is possible to live porn-free. Jesus is realistic about the power that sin can exert over us, but he also has a message of glorious hope for us, however low we have sunk:

Everyone who sins is a slave to sin ... [but] if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8 v 34, 36