

Can We Talk About Your Porn Stash?

You would rather not talk about your porn stash and I can understand that. I would rather not talk about it either.

If you grew up in the 1960s, 70s, or 80s, it might have been hidden between your mattress and box springs, a stack of dirty magazines mailed to you from Hugh Hefner or Bob Guccione. Maybe your father had one, too, and you happened upon it, innocently enough one day, as you rifled through his night table, looking for ... well, it doesn't matter.

Maybe there were 8 millimeter movies and a projector hidden in his closet. You preferred video cassettes in those low-tech times, when you could borrow them from friends or somehow summon the courage to rent them from the little room in the back of the neighborhood video store.

Then came the 1990s and the porn stash went high tech. The Internet proliferated with sordid videos, some by amateurs like the folks next door. There was lurid fiction and every fetish and perversion imaginable was on display — pictures, stories, videos, and even opportunities for interaction.

As the twenty-first century dawned, the porn stash reached new heights, marked by instant accessibility, apparent anonymity, and surprisingly strong addictiveness. Sometimes there were free samples and searching for almost anything on Google brought you to the edges of temptation. A few times, your wife asked what you did for so long online and once your kids wandered into some unsanitized browser history, but their suspicions never got any further, and so you pushed ahead with your prurient interests. Can we talk about your porn stash?

Whether it is nestled away on paper in a nightstand, lurking on a computer hard drive, or available to you by clicking on a web page, your porn stash is a filthy, addictive, morally expensive habit. You feel like you have been fortunate so far that no one has found it, but you would be better off if they did. Maybe then you would feel compelled to quit. Instead, you're just digging deeper.

Your porn stash will be found. Your kids will find it just like you found your Dad's and no amount of safeguarding will be sufficient. They will realize that you are not the man they thought, with all your hypocritical church-going and self-serving moralizing about others. Maybe you'll go too far and get caught up in a moral crisis, making contact with a harlot you find online, and your marriage will be wrecked. Maybe that harlot will present herself as a young girl, striking your fancy, but will turn out to be a 250-pound local deputy sheriff.

Maybe, though, you will live your whole life in secrecy, assuring yourself that an unsatisfying marriage bed justifies your fantasy refuge. You'll die and two things will happen. One is embarrassing and the other is fatal.

Your wife or kids will come to clean out your things and they'll find your favorite watch, a few dollars you had saved for a rainy day, some cherished photographs of the family when you were all younger, and your filthy, shameful porn stash. They'll eulogize you and bury you and wonder if they ever knew you.

Before they figure it out, you'll kneel before God in judgment and find out that, regardless of whether your family ever knew you, Christ never did (Matthew 7:21-23, 15:15-20). Despite your pious protestations, there was always a morbid part of your heart that belonged to the oppression and exploitation of your fellow sinners, women or men who provided you the imagery you needed to poison your soul (Matthew 5:28). Can we talk about your porn stash? It's not hurting anybody, right?

Studies show that most sex addicts and abusers begin just the way you did. As children, innocently, curiously, they go looking for something to explain the new urges and feelings they are experiencing. Instead of finding answers that are clinical or simply moral, they uncover a trove of verbal and photographic confusion. Some are repulsed, but too many are drawn into a world they cannot understand and, unless something radical happens, they are enslaved to sexual fantasy for the rest of their lives. Not hurting anybody? IT'S HURTING EVERYBODY!

The problem is not so much psychological and do not use addiction and disease as an excuse. It is not your wife's fault and it is not even your father's. There is no hope in rationalization, but there is hope in repentance from lust. "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

Can we talk about your porn stash, burning in a barrel out back? Follow the Ephesian magicians who repented of their sorcery by burning their magic books in a bonfire of remorse (Acts 19:18-19). "I will not be enslaved by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12).

What if your porn stash is on a computer hard drive or the Internet? How much would you rather go to heaven than hell? "I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:28-29).

Radical repentance and accountability (1 Corinthians 15:34). For many, the Internet is unavoidable, but to guard against surfing their way into torment, they agree to be held accountable by someone else, setting up a system to email their browser history to an accountability partner, risking embarrassment and exposure if they wander into the dark underbelly of the web. "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16).

Adapted from Jeff S. Smith