

An open, anonymous, letter to my fellow pastors who struggle with sexual purity.

What do you do when you're a 30-year-old long-time Christian, happily married, father of 2 beautiful little girls, who has just started his dream job in ministry . . . and you've never told anybody about a shameful problem that hovers, keeping you from greater kingdom effectiveness?

For me, the answer was to have small victories over my impure sexual thought life, to endure through some impactful failures, and hope that, someday, I would just be miraculously healed of this without having to tell anybody. That was truly my prayer, yet my actions and thoughts only changed for the worse.

Those actions and thoughts led me down a road where my growth in Christ was stunted and my marriage was becoming a place of mistrust and deception. Yet, in the midst of my foolishness, God had something in mind, for He is faithful even when I am faithless. It was during my first full-time ministry job, this dream job as a youth pastor, that I met the most real men I had ever met. They were youth pastors that I teamed with for ministry and, more importantly, regularly met with concerning our marriages and personal lives. Though I was still very guarded and had no intention of sharing with them my story, their willingness to talk about their masturbation history and current struggles gave me an example to follow. Maybe there was hope for me? Maybe I'm not alone? Maybe THEY would understand?

What kept me from making use of these relationships? In a word it was a drug called *secrecy*. By not telling anybody and "hoping for the best" since first being exposed to pornography at age 13, this secrecy had taken its toll on my soul and my heart. It was like a chemical inside of me that stirred whenever a sexualized image came to mind or crossed my path. I became consumed with how to act out in a way that wasn't only discreet, but didn't take much time and was cheap (if not free).

Finally it all, as they say, hit the fan. You see, my secretive ways had turned me into a very creative person when it came to indulging sexual images, acting out, and even coming up with ways to finance it all. Eventually, my creativity found a way to fund a newfound outlet, eventually spending a couple of hundred dollars searching for another "high". By God's grace, I never got involved with another person. You see, I was madly in love with my wife of 10 years and our sexual life was going quite well, from my perspective. I had compartmentalized my sin and shame so much that I did not see what it was doing to our marriage or even consider how it would make my wife feel – betrayed! She found a credit card charge, sought an explanation, and I could no longer pretend I didn't have a problem.

Looking at this some 15 years later, it is clear that neither I, nor anyone else, is meant to deal with sin alone. We are too easily persuaded by the father of lies, and we too easily give in to our flesh. Our spirit may be willing, but when we ignore God's plea to confess our sins to one another, we do not hear any other insight into what is going on inside of us. A starving spirit is no match for well-fed flesh. Even as

I write this, that same chemical is stirring, reminding me of the high of secrecy. So, I tell my wife right away what's going on inside of me, getting rid of the secrecy and allowing God's purposes to become my new consuming thought.

What else keeps me from relapses? There are a handful of people that know my story (about 15 in my life right now) who I would have to answer to. They are praying for me, cheering for me, and I would deeply disappoint them if I fell. Plus, God has given me a deep desire to help men, couples, and families that will be transformed by this account because someone will finally address their problem. My walk down memory lane is difficult, and my wife's pain is still being addressed. Why share this now? We must do all we can to confront what I think is Satan's #1 tool against Christ's bride – sexual sin.

- Maybe you've only dabbled in pornography, though you've never told anybody.
- Maybe you've had a history of infidelity, have come clean, but still secretly struggle.
- Maybe you currently have a debilitating habit of website browsing or taking second and third looks at that random image.
- Maybe you feel like there is no hope for true sexual purity, inside and out.

Through the ministry of others, will you allow the Holy Spirit to intervene in the midst of this shame-inducing, fear-producing desire? Do not let Satan convince you that you can overcome temptation on your own. Do something that your flesh doesn't want you to do – that your spirit longs for: tell somebody what's going on, for God has made you to walk through stuff, not avoid it.

You may contact me at free4jesus222@gmail.com. I am a pastor, currently serving in an Evangelical Free Church in Minnesota. I am a brother in the Lord who has struggled deeply himself and will do what's necessary to help you. Our conversation will be confidential. I'm praying for you.