

Where Did It FALL? By Gene McConnell



Gene McConnell is one of America's foremost experts on the impact of pornography, sexual addiction, abuse, and other high-risk behaviors. His mesmerizing story has positioned him to develop programs that have helped hundreds of people. Over the past 18 years Gene has helped train therapists, pastors, law enforcement officers, and medical professionals. He has been recognized for the excellence of his work by numerous organizations, including the Los Angeles Police Department. Gene has been interviewed as a subject expert on programs such as *Jenny Jones*, *Montel Williams*, *Donahue*, *Hard Copy*, *TBN*, *Geraldo*, *Tyra Banks*, *Good Morning S/A*, and many others.

Only recently have we begun to realize that sex – like drugs, alcohol, and food – can be an addiction. Many men and women use sex as a mood-altering substance to block the pain of depression, anger, or loneliness. Instead, the shame they feel after their actions only deepens the need to act out again and again.

Eventually they find themselves slaves to the behavior which once seemed to relieve them. This can be likened to walking with a rock in one's shoe and taking pain killers instead of removing the rock. Lasting relief can be found only when the person deals with his or her inner issues.

The Pornography Problem

Like many pornography addicts, my addiction started during adolescence and was preceded by sexual abuse. I used pornography to cope with my emotional pain; but instead of salving my wounds, porn merely fed the addiction. Satiating my pain required increasingly harder forms of pornographic material. Dr. Victor Cline, a clinical psychologist specializing in sexual addictions, identified a four-step process in addiction. Step 1) addiction to the material and repeated returns to it for sexual excitement; Step 2) an escalation of the individual's need for more explicit, deviant material to achieve the same level of sexual stimulation; Step 3) desensitization towards shocking material so that, in time, that material becomes acceptable and desirable to the viewer; Step 4) an increased tendency to start acting out sexual activities portrayed in pornography.

Pornography is not only highly addictive – it is filled with lies about women and relationships. A pornography addict may think his secret addiction is harmless when, in reality, it destroys relationships. Even soft-core pornography portrays women as mere objects existing only for sexual satisfaction. They are “pets” or “playmates” valued only from the neck down. Hardcore pornography teaches that women enjoy being abused or raped and that children are appropriate sexual partners. Furthermore pornography teaches that sex is purely recreational in nature. There is no emotional intimacy in pornography – only immediate physical satisfaction.

A man cannot continuously fill his mind with these degrading ideas without those ideas eventually affecting his relationships. I loved my wife and family

but was enslaved to pornography and sex. My fear of rejection by a “normal person” kept me from getting help. No one knew – not even my wife. A youth pastor with three children, I was respected in the church. Inside I was dying for someone to love me as I really was and wishing I could tell someone.

Viewing pornography eroded everything good in my life. The addiction increased to the point I needed a real person to alleviate my need. I did something I never would have believed myself capable of doing; I attempted rape. Getting arrested forced me to face my addiction.

In my travels around the world I have met hundreds of men and women who struggle with porn but have never told anyone. Many had already lost their families. It is dangerously naive to think their addiction vanishes when they come into the Church.

A Three-fold Approach

To help people overcome this addiction, we must understand its effect on the entire person – physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Physical. The rush of adrenaline coming from the shame and excitement of doing something forbidden combined with the physical responses of sexual excitement and orgasm is powerful. For this reason recovery from addiction to pornography must incorporate a therapist specializing in addictions. Unfortunately much of the advice given to pornography addicts focuses merely on stopping the behavior instead of dealing with porn's addictive nature.

Emotional. The sexual excitement and eventual release obtained through pornography is mood altering. Consequently addicts – many of whom have a history of abuse, shame, or emotional or physical abandonment – use porn to escape pain.

Emotional wounding is nearly always a factor in pornography addiction. Thus, the addict has an intense need for intimacy but is too afraid to pay the price of being vulnerable to another individual. Addicts are attracted to porn because the women in pornography won't reject them. They are attracted to prostitutes because no commitment is required. Therefore, a therapist with expertise in identifying emotional wounds is essential to recovery.

Spiritual. At the root of all addictions is the search to fill a void only a relationship with God can fill.

Jesus encountered this kind of emptiness in the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). Although she had drifted from one sexual encounter to another, she was still thirsty for more. Jesus offered her what she really needed – a relationship with Him. Addicts have a hard time reaching out for this living water. Because pornography has *increased* their sense of guilt and worthlessness, they are afraid to expose themselves to God or accept His love. Addicts must understand that only God's love can set them free from their bondage.

Typically psychologists and counselors have approached addiction exclusively as a problem of emotional wounding. On the other hand, some Christians have approached addiction exclusively as a problem of spiritual bondage. It is *both*, and the healing from one will not necessarily lead to healing the other. Therapist Jan Frank, a noted author on incest and sexual abuse recovery, says, “You can't ‘heal’ a bondage, and you can't ‘deliver’ a wound.”

Where Did It Fall?

In 2 Kings 6, a workman was cutting wood with a borrowed ax when the ax head flew off and landed in the water. The workman's cry of anguish attracted the prophet Elisha, who asked the man where it fell. After being shown the place, Elisha threw a stick of wood into the water. The ax head floated to the top and was easily retrieved. Notice the prophet makes the workman *return to the place of loss*. Then with a stick of wood, which suggests the cross of Christ, Elisha restores what was lost.

When faced with an emotional wound many of us pretend everything is ok. But we've lost our “cutting edge” – our ability to trust and love. Jesus asks, “What have you lost and where did you lose it?” Christ's cross heals us only when we are led back to our wounds and pain and face those wounds.

He Does Not Despise

“For the Lord hears the needy and does not despise His who are prisoners” (Psalm 69:33). The Lord does not despise captives, people locked in behavior patterns they can't break. Yet most addicts have never walked in spiritual and emotional freedom. They don't know how. They believe if anyone *knew* the truth about them they would despise them. Therefore, patience and unconditional love are critical to helping an addict recover.

Once my church learned of my addiction my fears

became reality, driving me away from the church and God. My life deteriorated until I visited a pastor friend. Without having planned it, I confessed my deepest secrets to him, pouring out my failure and guilt. I was *certain* he would loathe me. As he walked around his desk toward me, I almost expected him to strike me in outrage. Instead he embraced me, and wept over me. “I'm so, so sorry for the pain you must have gone through,” he said. For the first time in my life I understood God loved me, because my friend *showed* me. Most people share God's love at a distance. By hugging me, my friend offered a physical demonstration of the love of God.

In the Light

Although it is important to understand the roots of addiction, the addict must assume responsibility for his behavior. Not only did I have to serve jail time

for the attempted rape, I had to stop blaming others and take responsibility for my actions.

In 1 John 1:5-10, the writer exhorts us to “walk in the light.” He adds, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” One of the first steps to recovery from pornography addiction is repentance – coming into the light, becoming accountable to one another, and renouncing secrecy and deception. This is where

a small men's or women's group can play a critical role.

James 5:13-17 places a high value on confessing one's sin to an elder – someone who has successfully overcome the temptation. Just as we would not expect our best friend to treat a brain tumor, a pornography addict needs someone with the experience, wisdom, and skill to provide help. Support groups provide interaction with others going through the same addiction, but an addict is not helped by someone who merely “understands” his addiction. They need someone who can “lead them out.”

Working Together

Pastors and trained counselors must partner in helping addicts. Counselors are indispensable in identifying core issues and working on behaviors; but a counselor is a paid professional. Professional care can never replace the love an addict so desperately needs from the Church. Every addict needs a safe place where he or she will be loved, accepted, and challenged. The Church, with assistance from trained counselors and therapists, is the ideal setting.



*Scriptures are taken from the New American Standard Bible.