

Invisible Prisons: Pornography

Job 31:1-12, Col 3:1-21

Jasmine and I are thinking about renovating our bathroom,
and so we've had the builder out,
we've selected our tiles and fittings,
and we are waiting for the final quote.

The other night I said to Jas, "What if they take off the tiles, and discover a problem?
What if they discover white ants in the timber
or a structural fault behind the gyprock?"
And Jas said, "I guess the price goes up!"
Have you been in that kind of situation before?
Things look sturdy and safe, but underneath, just cm's away from the surface,
it's all rotting away and falling apart.

I present this image to you
as an illustration of our society's relationship with pornography.
It is possible to be ignorant of just how pervasive pornography is,
but there are signs that there is a big problem underneath the surface:
while murder and armed robbery rates are down, sexual assault is up.
The amount of sexual content on TV is increasing,
these are signs that pornography is influencing our culture for the worse.

And just like white ants are only one tile away from being exposed,
so too it doesn't take much work to lay your eyes on some pornography.
Just a few clicks on your computer and there it is.

I could overwhelm you with statistics, but I'll resist that urge,
only to give you one fact that startled me.
I looked up a list of the most popular web sites in Australia,
and in the top 15, three of them are pornography sites.
In contrast, the most popular banking website came in at #20.
Just think for a moment about how important the banks are to our daily lives;
They're where we keep our money, they're where we make transactions,
and yet Australians are more likely to go the web to look at porn
than they are to check their money.
You might not be able to see it,
but pornography is everywhere and its damaging.

So this is the last in our short three part series on invisible prisons.
A series looking at habits that can be hidden,
yet they're common *and* addictive *and* at odds with how God wants us to live.
We've been following the same outline over the three weeks:
after starting with a brief look at the *nature* of the prison,

we've spoken about how to *avoid* the prison
and also about what might be involved in *breaking free* from the prison.

And all the while we've been paying attention to what God says in the Bible,
allowing the Bible to motivate us to take seriously the dangers of each trap,
and also allowing the Bible to remind us of God's grace and desire to help.

And so as we turn to the Bible this week,
the best place to start is a reminder of the how the Bible views sexuality.
Like our other three habits,
pornography is essentially a distortion of something good.
So what does good sex look like? We'll start with the words of Jesus himself:

In response to a question about divorce, Jesus replied (and this is in Matthew 19:4)
"Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."
In this verse Jesus quotes from the story of Adam and Eve (in Genesis)
and in doing so Jesus affirms a couple of things about marriage and families.

First of all, the ideal scenario is of a man and a woman forming a family unit.
I understand that sometimes families must struggle on with only one parent,
sometimes that's how life turns out
and if you are a single parent then I want to say that you are welcome here
and I take my hat off to you, it's tough job that you have.

But where things *have* gone according to plan
and we have a man and a woman who are together,
then note how Jesus places an emphasis on their *unity*;
he says that the two will become 'one flesh'.

Now unity can take a number of expressions.
A husband and wife sleep in the same bed,
they might share a bank account,
in most cases they share a last name.
But one of the most significant expressions of unity is that they have sex.
And not only is sex an act of physical unity
but the hormones that are released during sex – oxytocin in particular –
help the partners form an emotional attachment.

And Jesus also sees this bond as something that others shouldn't mess with
What God has joined together, let no one separate he says.
How might someone seek to separate this bond?
Well, someone from outside the couple may try to seduce one of the parties,
bosses might be so demanding of their staff that marriages start to suffer,

or the danger might come from within;
one party might start to bond with someone else.

So in Matthew 19 Jesus is defending the ideal of marriage,
it's between a man and a woman who are unified
and whose unity must be protected.

In other parts of the Bible erotic marriage is not so much defended but celebrated.
When was the last time you had a read of Song of Songs?
At one point the female voice in Song of Songs says
Let my beloved come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.
Now what is she talking about there?
I'll give you a hint:
it's not something that you might see on Gardening Australia!
It's a metaphor for making love;
she's inviting the man to make love to her. To which he responds:
I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride;
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.
I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey;
I have drunk my wine and my milk.
So while Jesus defends the right place and purpose of sex
(unifying a man and a woman in marriage),
Song of Songs celebrates the right of married people to enjoy it.

So that's a quick theology of sex from the teaching of the Bible.
Some people might say it's very restrictive and impossible to attain.
Yes it is restrictive, but no, it's not impossible, although it does take discipline.

The problem with *pornography* is that it undermines this model
and makes it even *harder* to align our sexuality with Biblical expectations.
How does pornography interfere with a Biblical approach to sexuality?
Well, how long have we got?
We don't have nearly enough time
to explain all the problems that pornography creates,
but let me highlight some.

What's interesting is that in recent years it hasn't only been Christians
who've raised concerns about pornography,
but secular research has identified numerous issues with this material.

The basic problem is that pornography rewires your brain
by interfering with your natural systems of arousal.
When you look at porn you're setting off the same chemical reactions
that real sex is meant to set off,
but it's not a physical person who is in front of you.
The end result is that you're training yourself to be turned on by what you

see and hear on a screen.

Now this causes all sorts of problems when it comes to real sex.

I've heard stories of men who can no longer function in the bedroom without first looking at porn to get them going. Because their arousal system is conditioned by the sights and sounds of a video, when the extra sensations of a real physical body are thrown into their mix their own bodies become confused. Because they're accustomed to being turned on by the acts and scenes they see on screens, the body of a real person is no longer enough to satisfy them.

I remember when I was in year 7 or 8, the student minister at the church I attended was conducting a youth Bible Study, and I remember hearing him say "if you look at porn, you'll ruin your sex life as an adult". What an important thing for a boy in his junior high school years to hear. It was the right advice at exactly the right time, because by the end of yr 8 most boys have had their first exposure to porn, and if that exposure is not curtailed, then we are setting them up to fail miserably at being husbands.

In fact one minister I know has a very specific warning for young women. He says "The chance of finding a male spouse who doesn't have a history of pornography use is very low. You must have the frank conversation about what their relationship with pornography is, and if its not something that has been properly dealt with and is now past, then don't marry them!"

And by the way, research tells us that this isn't just a male problem, young women are using porn in increasing numbers, so it's a problem that's even more widespread than what we might think.

The problems with pornography extend beyond problems with intimacy. I know my focus has been on the effect porn has on married sex, but if you're single that doesn't mean you can ignore this. No matter who you are, pornography can never be accepted as a good idea

One of the chemical reactions that takes place when viewing pornography is that it releases dopamine in the brain. Dopamine is the hormone that helps the brain register excitement. The problem is that over time you need more and more dopamine to generate the same effect, which is the reason why pornography is addictive like a drug.

And in order to gain the same effect and excitement over time,
you need to watch pornography that's more and more extreme.
Research says that pornography is becoming more and more violent.
and that's because the old stuff just doesn't provide the same effect.
And so it's no surprise that sexual assault is on the way up,
because that's how people are training their minds to receive pleasure.
You might not get married, but keep pornography in your life
and you could become a violent criminal; that's not an outrageous scenario.

Or if you do get married,
you could find yourself pressuring your partner into violent sex,
or to perform acts they're uncomfortable with, or acts that are dangerous,
because you need them to do what you're used to seeing on a screen.

It's also a factor in extra marital affairs,
it encourages people to look for pleasure aside from their partner,
but that's a forlorn hope
because in reality they're attracted to their screens rather than a real person.

And then there's the issue of the person who you're looking at on the screen.
The creation of pornography is associated with human trafficking
and child sexual abuse.
Don't fall for the idea of the porn industry
providing a wonderfully regulated career path with happy employees.
On the whole it's an incredibly dehumanizing way to work that ruins people.
Is that what you want your viewing habits to feed? I hope it isn't.

Do I need to go on?
Do you see the way in which pornography undermines Biblical sexuality?
Instead of helping two people express and develop their unity,
it makes that unity harder to maintain.

It also undermines the chances of two people enjoying sex.
The two characters in Song of Songs really enjoy each other's bodies.;
But when a pornography habit is present
then at least one half is never going to feel adequate,
and they might be asked to provide sex that they don't enjoy.

So it really is a terrible prison that more and more people find themselves in,
and so we must do everything within our power to avoid this prison.

Our two readings today
speak a little bit about the importance of discipline in the Christian life,
and some self-imposed discipline is worth embracing.
In our OT reading,
Job tells us of his decision to maintain his own sexual purity:

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.
And why has he made this decision?

Well, he adds another dimension to those we've been discussing,
and that is that he knows that God knows what he's looking at,
and he knows God will bring judgment upon those who forgo discipline.
According to Job you don't even have to have an actual affair,
just having your heart enticed is terrible enough,
and he knows that the heart can be led with the eyes.

Verse 7 if my steps have turned from the path, *if my heart has been led by my eyes*, or if my hands have been defiled, then may others eat what I have sown, and may my crops be uprooted.

So Job would say 'you need to watch your eyes lest you fall foul of God's judgment!'
Paul said the same thing in our NT passage from Colossians, didn't he?
Ch 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

I asked you earlier to imagine a house that looks ok, but is riddled with white ants.
When the damage is extreme what are you going to do with the house?
You need to rip out the rot, and maybe that means knocking the house down,
and then the whole thing needs to be rebuilt.
That's what God is planning to do on judgment day,
and you don't want to be in the house when it gets knocked down.
Please for the sake of your loved ones and for the sake of your own soul,
recognise the problem that is pornography, and put it to death!
Make your decision to escape the prison.

As we've been saying, these prisons aren't ones you can just walk out of.
You'll need help formulating a plan and sticking to a plan.
Here's a useful website, put together by our own Anglican denomination
resistporn.org. Heaps of really useful information,
They go into the science of pornography addiction, the relational effects,
Commonly asked questions like whether its ok for couples to look at
pornography together and so on.
They outline a basic 7 step plan as to how you might break free of this habit.
They have list of local counselors who can help as well.
It's a website that's well worth looking at.

Secondly we've spoken about Gamblers Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous;
There's also Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (1300 025 983)
who list pornography addiction as something they can help with.
The closest meeting I've found is at St Augustine's Anglican Church
in Neutral Bay, which is at 75 Shellcove Rd, on Fridays at 6:30pm.

But we've also been talking about
the general resources that are available for every Christian person,
such as the Church community and the Bible itself
and this week I want to remind you of the importance of prayer.

On the resistporn website they say that the first step in breaking free
is to confess to someone that you have a problem.
When you name the problem for what it is
then you have an enemy to attack and a reason to attempt change.

And so alongside that advice,
perhaps the first prayer we should pray is a prayer of confession.
To admit to *God* that, yes, we are misusing his good gift of sexuality
to the detriment of not only ourselves but to the people around us.
And remember, if we confess our sins, God will forgive us our sins.
There is a lot of guilt within the Christian church about pornography,
which is appropriate because it's a terrible thing,
but God's forgiveness is real and he's ready to dispense it.

And that prayer of confession should be followed by a prayer for help!
The Lord's Prayer is a good prayer to use.
Forgive us our sins ... lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
Pray it with your particular addiction in mind.
It may be a slow process,
you may need to confess some more
as you make some wrong turns in your escape,
but if you want him to help
and if you're willing to work with the help he provides through others, then
freedom can be yours!

Pray.