

Accountability & Bible Engagement: Armor Against Sexual Temptation



*A special research report commissioned by Band of Brothers
November 2011*

Increasingly churches are recognizing the toll sexual temptation, particularly in the form of pornography, is taking on families. Many are taking steps to confront what has been called the “elephant in the pew” through open discussions, prayer, and special events. Other churches have adopted a more long-term approach by establishing accountability groups or partnerships. In these settings, each person has one or more people to whom they are accountable for their thoughts and actions. The idea behind accountability is that, in an environment of honesty, love, and support, Christ followers can help each other overcome temptations and grow in their relationship with Christ.



Source: Mars Hill. <http://marshilljourney.blogspot.com/2007/10/big-blue.html>

Previous Center for Bible Engagement (CBE) research has documented that pornography use is now so common among American men that it is a mainstream issue. Although rates are somewhat lower among Christ-followers, still a significant minority struggle with pornography.

A special Center for Bible Engagement study, in partnership with Band of Brothers, expands on the topics of sexual temptation and pornography among men. Using data from surveys of 5,300 men, we find that lust is the most common and strongest temptation among men. But men are not powerless. Two spiritual practices, regular scripture engagement and accountability, provide powerfully protective armor.

How Many Men Struggle With Sexual Temptation?

The reality is that we frequently face the temptation to do or have something we know we shouldn't. CBE research reveals that most people face three to five temptations in a typical day. For men, temptation most often comes in the form of lust. In fact, three out of five men who attend church regularly list lust or pornography as their most frequent temptation.

Sexual temptation appears to be particularly spiritually destructive. Temptations to use pornography occur more times a day and men with this temptation spend more time thinking about it, than other temptations. Similarly, lust temptations last longer than other types of temptation.

The temptation of lust and high rates of pornography use are also associated with more feelings of hopelessness & bitterness, feeling like you need to hide from others, feeling unable to please God and experiencing spiritual stagnation.

How Many Men Have Someone Hold Them Accountable?

The vast majority of men say that having someone that holds them accountable for their thoughts and actions is very important to them. Few, however, have such a person in their lives. Our surveys show that approximately one-fifth of men are held accountable in a typical week.

The Difference Bible Engagement & Accountability Make

CBE research has clearly demonstrated the power of regular scripture engagement to impact harmful behaviors. For men dealing with sexual temptation, reading or listening to the Bible four or more days a week significantly reduces the odds of viewing pornography. The effect of Bible engagement is over and above other spiritual factors such as being a Christ-follower, attending church, and prayer.

I am just a normal guy. I go to church and work a steady job and still the issue of temptation to live an impure life is a problem. I have struggled with porn for several years before I realized I had a problem.

From "Undressing Her With My Eyes"
Guest post on www.xxxchurch.com, 10/26/2011

Many argue that for men, in particular, community with other men in truth-telling relationships is critical for thriving spiritually, especially in dealing with sexual temptation. Qualitative studies suggest that participation in groups such as Promise Keepers do help men deal with and overcome their struggles.¹

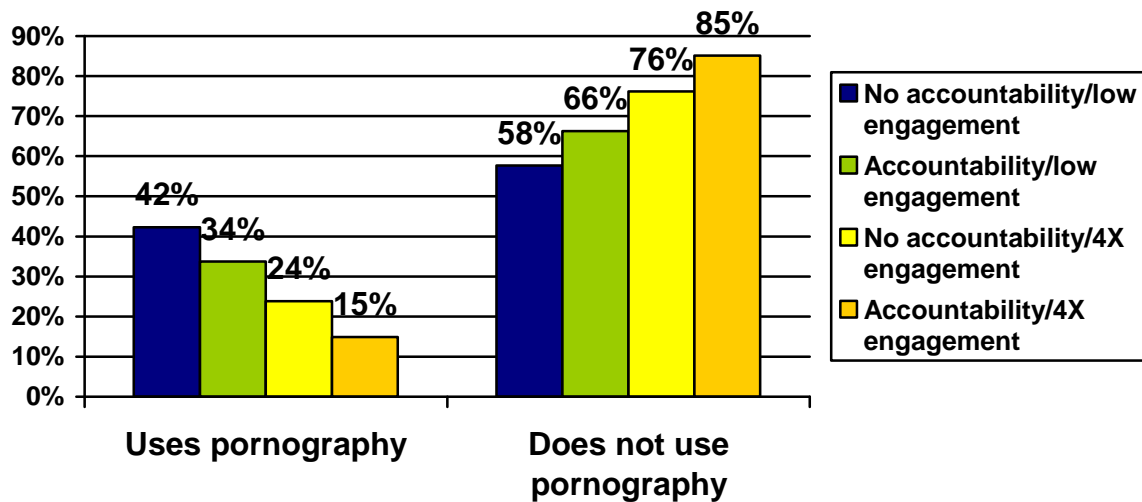
In this study, we tested whether accountability is associated with less pornography use among men. Figure 1 shows how the rates of viewing pornography vary dramatically depending on Bible engagement level and personal accountability.

Men who do not engage scripture regularly and do not have someone who holds them accountable have the highest rates of pornography. Two out of five in this group view pornography. The rate is significantly lower, 34%, among those who do not engage scripture, but have accountability.

The effect of Bible engagement is clear: Men who read or listen to scripture most days of the week have lower rates of pornography use. Accountability also plays a role as well. Rates of viewing pornography are lowest for men who combine these two powerful spiritual practices: engaging the Bible four or more times a week and having someone hold them accountable for their thoughts and actions.

¹ Bartkowski, J. (2000) Breaking walls, raising fences: Masculinity, intimacy, and accountability among the Promise Keepers, *Sociology of Religion* 61(1): 33-53; Garfield, R. (2010). Male emotional intimacy: How therapeutic men's groups can enhance couples therapy. *Family Process* 49 (1): 109+; Singleton, A. (2003). Men getting real? A study of relationship change in two men's groups. *Journal of Sociology* 39(2): 131+.

Figure 1. Pornography Use, Accountability, & Bible Engagement Among Men.



While the results presented in Figure 1 are certainly encouraging, they are limited by the fact that they don't take into account other differences among the groups. That is, men who engage scripture or have an accountability relationship may also differ in terms of age, if they are a Christ-follower, and church attendance. These three factors may be related to their likelihood of viewing pornography as well.

We used multivariate statistical analyses to test the effects of Bible engagement and accountability on pornography use, taking into account these other factors. Our results show conclusively that these relationships continue to hold up, even when other differences among these groups are statistically controlled. Table 1 shows that, among men, engaging scripture most days of the week reduces the odds of viewing pornography by 34%. In addition, having accountability further reduces the odds by 31%.

Table 1. Logistic Regression Results Predicting Pornography Use.

| Predictors | Odds of Viewing Pornography |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Engages scripture 4X or more per week | ↓ 34%*** |
| Has accountability | ↓ 31%* |

N = 4,228 *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Conclusions

For most men who are striving to follow Christ, spiritual attacks in the form of sexual temptation are a daily reality. Three out of five men sitting in church pews regularly faces the temptation of lust or pornography. Sexual temptation differs from other temptations not only in its pervasiveness, but also in its ability to create feelings of hopelessness, guilt, and spiritual stagnation.

For men struggling in this area, two powerful weapons are available. First, men are encouraged to wield the sword of the Spirit by receiving, reflecting on, and applying the Word of God regularly. As this and other CBE research demonstrates, regular Bible engagement produces real life transformation and helps Christ-followers become more like Christ.

This special study reveals a second powerful weapon: accountability. Through trusting relationships where men regularly hold each other accountable for their thoughts and actions, men can triumph over the spiritual attacks of sexual temptation and pornography.

Many churches struggle today to establish an environment where congregants feel safe to be honest and transparent with each other. Smaller groups specifically established for the purpose of accountability in Christian community may provide such a setting. As author and speaker Chuck Colson² has noted:

Though I know intellectually how vulnerable I am to pride and power, I am the last one to know when I succumb to their seduction. That's why spiritual Lone Rangers are so dangerous - and why we must depend on trusted brothers and sisters who love us enough to tell us the truth.

About the authors:

Dr. Pamela Ovwigho serves as the Research Director for the Center for Bible Engagement at Back to the Bible. CBE surveys thousands of people every year about their spiritual lives.

Dr. Arnie Cole is the CEO of Back to the Bible, an international ministry dedicated to using media and technology to lead people into a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ.

About the Center for Bible Engagement:

The Center for Bible Engagement (CBE), a research and development division of Back to the Bible, seeks to answer the question: Why do so many people own Bibles but so few read them? The center goes beyond simply usage statistics to consider attitudes and behaviors that significantly impact spiritual growth and a person's relationship with God. The primary goal of the CBE is to develop tools and resources that will engage people with God's Word. Since its inception in 2003, CBE has become the major world center addressing Bible engagement and spiritual growth.

² Colson, C. (1984). The problem of power. *Jubilee*. Available online: <http://www.breakpoint.org/search-library/search?view=searchdetail&id=1440>