

# Sex & Porn

If you've got your bibles, go ahead and turn with me to Matthew 5. If you don't have a bible, feel free to use one of ours, found on the end of each row. If you don't own a bible at all, feel free to take that one home with you as a gift from us to you. This week and next week will be our final two Sundays in *The God of Sex* series. As just as a heads up, next Sunday we will be discussing the very important issue of sexual abuse and sexual assault. And one reason I want to tell you about that is because I know for a lot of people it's a difficult topic. So we're going to try to be as helpful as possible with it—we actually are having a licensed counselor work with us to craft the teaching, so as to be the most helpful. But that being said, I know that might be a tough week for some of you to be at. So next week, if you need to for whatever reason, *not* be here, I want to tell you that's okay. We'll post the teaching online afterwards so you can listen to it there when you're ready or read it as a PDF if that makes it better. But I did want to mention it today for that reason.

Today however, for the next forty or so minutes, we're going to talk about porn. And that, really, is my entire intro. No clever story or cultural insight—just “porn is a thing our world, so we might as well talk about it.” Look with me at Matthew 5, starting in v. 27:

*[27] “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ [28] But I say to you that everyone who **looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.***

Jesus says that his followers shouldn't congratulate themselves for simply stopping short of adultery. Because, Jesus says, “if you've ever looked at a woman you're not married to to lust after her,” you've already basically committed the same sin in your heart. Just so we're clear, **lust would be fantasizing about sex or intimacy, or craving romantic attention from anyone that you aren't married to.** That's what Jesus is talking about here—whether it's by a guy or a girl. Now *pornography*—at least as we think of it today—didn't exist in his day. But that phrase “looking at a woman with lustful intent” does a pretty apt job of describing exactly what pornography is. **What is porn if not the innovation of newer and more creative ways for people to look at other people lustfully?**

And if that is porn's goal, it's doing a pretty good job at it. Conservative estimates say that porn is a \$97 billion dollar industry worldwide, with \$12 billion of that coming from the U.S.<sup>1</sup> To put that in perspective, that means porn grosses more money than professional baseball, basketball, and football combined. It is *the fastest growing industry in the world.*<sup>2</sup>

As far as the makeup of the porn-using population, 70% of men and 30% of women use porn regularly,<sup>3</sup> but it's almost inevitable that those numbers are underestimated because of the nature of the subject. If the question on the survey is “do you look at porn?”, you're almost always gonna have less people admit to looking at it than actually do. Most likely the numbers for women are *drastically* underestimated, simply because it is still often considered more taboo for women to view porn than men. ~~In general, guys feel~~

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/things-are-looking-americas-porn-industry-n289431>

<sup>2</sup> [https://medium.com/@Strange\\_bt\\_True/how-big-is-the-porn-industry-fbc1ac78091b](https://medium.com/@Strange_bt_True/how-big-is-the-porn-industry-fbc1ac78091b)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/03/internet-porn-stats\\_n\\_3187682.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/03/internet-porn-stats_n_3187682.html)

~~the freedom to discuss or even joke about their porn habit, while women generally don't.~~ Because of that, many studies put the estimate for women who regularly view porn at more like 40-60% realistically.

Porn is a part of a *lot* of people's story, in one way or another. Most every guy I know has porn as part of their story. I know countless *women* for whom porn is a part of their story. Porn is a part of *my* story. I saw my first pornographic image when I was 11 years old. I went over to a friend's house and he said "have you seen this website?" I said I hadn't, and then he showed the website to me. That day, in many ways, started a 15-20 year addiction to pornography. **Porn affects a lot of people, myself included, followers of Jesus included.**

**It is far more common than a whole lot of people realize.** And because of that, it's becoming increasingly *socially acceptable*. Whereas previous generations would've considered porn morally wrong even if they participated in it, that is less and less the case with younger generations. Only one in 20 young adults say their friends think viewing pornography is a bad thing.<sup>4</sup> In one survey, teens and young adults said they thought "not recycling" was more immoral than viewing porn.<sup>5</sup> And 80% of porn users report feeling no sense of guilt when using porn.<sup>6</sup>

Here's my point: functionally and confessionally, **a vast majority of people regularly view porn regularly and see nothing really all that wrong about it.** / By contrast, let's see what *Jesus* has to say about *lust*, the desire that fuels porn. Look at v. 29:

*[29] If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away [as in, your eyeball]. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*

Jesus seems to take this whole lust thing just a tad more seriously than many of us do. His advice for what to *do* about lust is to—and I quote—"gouge out your eye" and "cut off your hand." Now, let's just be completely honest. Many of us hear Jesus say that about lust and go "whoa, Jesus. Slow your roll, man. Let's not get excessive—it's just porn. It's can't be *that big* of a deal." Now most of us pick up on the fact that Jesus is using *hyperbole* here: he's using over-the-top language to make a point. But even *still*, to many of us, it feels almost absurd to take something as common as lust *that seriously*. **It seems to many of us like lust in general, and porn specifically is so inevitable, that to respond with that kind of intensity is sort of overkill.**

And really, that's because porn falls right in the sweet spot of our favorite American belief when it comes to ethics. Which is this: "if it makes you happy, and it doesn't hurt anybody else, go for it." I can't tell you how many times I have heard versions of that belief parroted on the news, talk shows, and pop media—I'm sure you have too. "If it makes you happy, and it doesn't hurt anybody else, go for it." And porn very much *seems* like it passes that test, right? It makes us happy (I think *that's* pretty evident from the stats), and it sure doesn't *seem* like it hurts anybody else—it's just you and an iPhone screen right? How could that be harmful to anybody *else*? So what's the big deal about porn?

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.challies.com/articles/10-ugly-and-updated-numbers-about-pornography-use/>

You see, part of the reason porn is so common is because out of all the vices that exist, it definitely seems the most harmless. Part of the reason porn doesn't seem worth resisting is because it seems to many of us like a victimless activity. It doesn't seem like it's causing any real damage to us or anybody else, so what's the real harm in participating in it? I think either consciously or unconsciously, that's the belief many of us hold when it comes to porn. So if it makes us happy, but doesn't hurt anybody, what's the big deal about watching it? That's the question.

So here's what I'd like to do for the next little while. I'd like to try and show you why that belief—that “porn is harmless”—simply *is not* true. I'd like to show you, if I can, that porn is absolutely not, by any stretch of the imagination, a victimless activity. It is not harmless. Actually, far from it. **In fact, I think you could make the argument that viewing porn is one of the sins that has the most widespread impacts of any sin out there.** That it has more “victims,” if we can call it that, than many other vices do. And my goal with this isn't to scare you away from porn—not at all. In high school, I kid you not, our sex ed teacher started the class by saying “if you have sex, you will die from an STD before you're 35.” That was how he *started*. His goal was to scare us out of having sex. That's not my goal today with porn. This isn't that. But I do want to make sure that we're clear on the effects that porn does have. **Because I think the belief is that it's harmless to participate in, I think it's at least fair to evaluate that claim to see if it's true.** So let's talk for a bit about some of the the “victims” of porn:

## Victim #1: Ourselves

First, porn isn't harmless to the *person who looks at it*. Scientifically, we now know that porn actually *changes the way your brain functions*. Neuroscientists have said that porn actually affects the brain in many of the same ways as drugs like cocaine. Viewing porn actually creates neurological pathways in your brain. And each time you look at porn, the pathway to porn in your brain gets reinforced and strengthened. So think of a trail in the woods. The way the brain works is that every time you go down a particular trail towards pleasure—eating a cheeseburger, hanging out with friends, watching your favorite TV show, that trail gets cut a little deeper and a little wider. And over a long period of time, those routes towards pleasure and satisfaction become easier and easier, because the trail gets cut more and more. Now, if that's how the brain normally works, then porn is like coming through the trail with an industrial weed eater. Eventually, it becomes difficult to pursue pleasure in other ways, because that route to pleasure is so worn in and so easy. This is how porn addiction happens.<sup>7</sup>

Eventually, those pathways in your brain towards porn become so strong that they can start overriding the desire for healthy things like eating or sleeping or meaningful relationships. **So the person who tells their friends they can't hang out one night, and then stays up until 3:00am looking at porn—that person isn't just really into porn. Their brain has actually been hijacked into thinking that they need porn more than other things *that they actually need*.**

In some ways, we acknowledge that this is a problem. We have twelve-step programs for sex addicts just like we have them for drugs and alcohol. But in other ways we don't. We still insist in many arenas of life that there is nothing seriously wrong with a regular porn habit. Meanwhile it's causing *immense* harm to our own well-being. That's victim #1.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/5/3/388/htm>

## Victim #2: Our Relationships

The second victim of porn is our sexual relationships. It changes our sexual tastes, what we want out of sex. And it now starts very early on. In a recent study of 16-18 year olds, nearly *every participant* indicated learning how to have sex by watching porn.<sup>8</sup> Now you might ask, “what’s the problem with that?” *Here’s* the problem with that: *porn isn’t real*. I saw a post on Reddit the other day that said “learning how to have sex by watching porn is like learning how to drive by watching *The Fast & the Furious*.” Maybe we all *wish* we could drive like that, but guess what: *you can’t drive like that*. And the people you’re *watching* can’t drive like that either. What you’re seeing on the screen *is not real*.

But it’s not just affecting teenagers, it’s affecting all of us. Two researchers at the University of Alabama (so I mean, take it or leave it) found that porn makes many individuals less satisfied with the following things: (1) their own partners’ physical appearance, (2) sexual performance, (3) sexual curiosity, (4) and affection.<sup>9</sup> *I don’t know if you were paying attention, but that’s pretty much all of a modern romantic relationship. The more you watch porn, the less satisfied you are in sex with your partner.* Naomi Wolf articulates the problem perfectly in her article, *The Porn Myth*.<sup>10</sup>

*For most of human history, erotic images have been reflections of, or celebrations of, or substitutes for, real naked women. For the first time in human history, the images’ power and allure have supplanted [in other words, replaced] that of real naked women. Today, real naked women are just bad porn.*

**Porn isn’t helping us have sex—it’s actually replacing sex.** This contributes to the phenomenon of E.D. among younger and younger men. One study revealed that as porn has become more prominent and mainstream, more and more men under 40 have reported an inability to be sexually aroused by sex with their partners. And there’s a good bit of evidence that this isn’t just correlation, but actually causation.<sup>11</sup> The more porn you watch, the less able you are to be turned on by a real, flesh-and-blood sexual partner. **The popular-level argument that “porn helps you have better sex with your partner” is a purely emotional one, not a logical one. The more accurate statement statistically would be “porn helps you not be able to have sex with your partner.”**

Porn also affects our relationships in general—not just in regards to sex. Research shows that pornography consumption is linked to less stability in relationships,<sup>12</sup> increased risk of infidelity,<sup>13</sup> and greater likelihood of divorce.<sup>14</sup> Here’s my point: **porn impacts our relationships, significantly, and not**

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from Jon Tyson’s *Sexual Formation* teaching, available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTGrYxeEZ9U>

<sup>9</sup> Zillman, D. & Bryant, J. (1988) Pornography’s Impact On Sexual Satisfaction. *Journal Of Applied Social Psychology*, 18, 438-453. Doi: 10.1111/J.1559-1816.1988.Tb00027.X

<sup>10</sup> [http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/trends/n\\_9437/](http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/trends/n_9437/)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5039517/>

<sup>12</sup> Schneider, J. P. (2000). Effects Of Cybersex Addiction On The Family: Results Of A Survey. *Sexual Addiction And Compulsivity*, 7, 31-58. [Doi:10.1080/10720160008400206](https://doi.org/10.1080/10720160008400206)

<sup>13</sup> Zillmann, D. (2000). Influence Of Unrestrained Access To Erotica On Adolescents’ And Young Adults’ Dispositions Toward Sexuality. *Journal Of Adolescent Health*, 27(2), 41-44. [Doi:10.1016/S1054-139X\(00\)00137-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1054-139X(00)00137-3)

<sup>14</sup> Schneider, J. P. (2000). Effects Of Cybersex Addiction On The Family: Results Of A Survey. *Sexual Addiction And Compulsivity*, 7, 31-58. [Doi:10.1080/10720160008400206](https://doi.org/10.1080/10720160008400206)

**for the better.** Porn is actually killing real sexual intimacy between human beings. That's victim #2. And lastly...

### **Victim #3: Our treatment of women**

There's a lot of debate out there about the correlation between porn and sexual assault. Some say there's absolutely a connection there, some say absolutely not. A lot of what you hear depends on the agenda of the person talking about it. But regardless of the answer to *that* question, a couple things are clear.

**One is that the pornography industry is absolutely male-dominated.** The producers of pornography are almost entirely men. That's inevitably going to impact what type of porn gets produced. And the other thing, related to that, **is an awful lot of porn glorifies violence towards women.** Back in 2010, a researcher studied incidents of aggression in best-selling porn films. She indicated that 88% of those scenes showed verbal or physical aggression, and women were on the *receiving* end of the aggression more than 90% of the time.<sup>15</sup> In another 2016 study, many of the young women surveyed said they have often felt pressured to play out the scripts their male partners had learned from porn. They felt pressured into having sex in uncomfortable positions, faking sexual responses, and consenting to unpleasant or painful acts.<sup>16</sup>

Plain and simple, **porn is harming the way we treat women in our society.** Whether it leads to violence or not, sexual assault or not, **it's hard to argue that porn is helping us to see women as valuable human beings worthy of our dignity and respect.** Instead, porn is *training* us to see other people—men *and* women—as sexual objects that exist for our pleasure. Which is precisely the thing Jesus warns against in Matthew 5.

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So, as I told you from the beginning, the reason I wanted to take you on that long, somewhat depressing detour about porn is to simply pull back the curtain a little bit. I wanted you to see that **the belief that “porn is harmless” is a myth—plain and simple. It is not true, by any interpretation of the data, that porn is a harmless activity.** And to be honest, plenty of people in our culture are picking up on this—followers of Jesus or not. But at the same time, plenty of people aren't picking up on it. Plenty of people don't think it's an issue at all. As an example, I want to show you a short clip of an interview Jimmy Kimmel did last month with Kanye West. Take a look...

*[Video of Kanye-Kimmel interview - 0:50]*

When asked “has having daughters affected the way you view women,” Kanye's response is “no, I still watch plenty of porn.” Now, I show you that one, because it is just so very easy to pick on Kanye. Like, so easy. And I think that's why so many people are laughing when he says what he says—because that is just such classic Kanye right? It's so very Kanye to write a song decrying the objectification of women

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/magazine/teenagers-learning-online-porn-literacy-sex-education.html>

<sup>16</sup> Rothman, E. F., Kaczmarzky, C., Burke, N., Jansen, E., & Baughman, A. (2015). “Without Porn...I Wouldn't Know Half The Things I Know Now”: A Qualitative Study Of Pornography Use Among A Sample Of Urban, Low-Income, Black And Hispanic Youth.

and then also see no problem with his own objectification of women. So we can laugh and poke fun at Kanye, right? Go right ahead.

But at the same time, I'm not gonna let the rest of us off that easy. I think Kanye's disconnect there is actually just an exaggerated version of our entire culture's disconnect. We all want to operate as if there is no connection between our consumption of porn, and how we treat other people. As if there's this solid, brick wall in our lives between what porn trains us to believe, and how we actually go about relationships. **We want to pretend that spending hours objectifying people on a screen won't ever affect the way we treat other human beings sexually.** ~~That participating in an entire industry built around objectifying people won't ever lead to us to actually objectifying people.~~ Can you see naive of a belief that is to hold? **What we consume affects what we do.** But we don't want to believe that it does. And so we keep operating that way, just like Kanye, with a smile and a chuckle. And meanwhile our sexuality is being stolen from us by porn, and taking our treatment of other people along with it.

And so the damage goes on. At cultural level, but also for many of us individually. Many of us in this room are currently being eaten alive by an addiction to porn. And here's my guess—most of us *here today* don't *actually think* it's is harmless. We know it's destructive. But as much as we may not want to look at it, we still do. My guess is that many of us in the room feel completely powerless against porn. We keep returning to it, again and again, even though we don't *want* to. This is something that pastors and counselors call the “shame cycle.” Often, what happens is that after we look at porn, we immediately feel this enormous sense of guilt and shame over it, which leads to isolation and self-worth issues, which very often leads us right back to porn as an escape from it all. So we run back to porn again and again and again.

This is feels very similar to what Paul describes in Romans 7. Take a look with me on the screen:

*[21] So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. [22] For in my inner being I delight in God's law; [23] but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.*

I think Paul just described to a T many of our experiences in this room when it comes to things like porn. “Even though I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me.” “I delight in who God is, I want to honor him with everything, but this compulsion towards sin *just keeps happening*. This cycle of shame just keeps bringing me back, time and time again, to the very thing I *don't want to do*.” This all leads Paul to confront one, very sober, very dark reality about himself, in v. 24:

*[24] What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?*

Paul says I feel hopelessly lost. I feel like there is no delivering myself from this cycle of sin and shame, sin and shame. “How is it possible that I could be rescued out of it?” And then the glorious answer to his question, in v. 25:

*[25] Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

God himself can deliver us from it. Through Jesus, we as his followers *can be, and will be* delivered from the cycle of sin and shame. By taking our sin—our lust, our objectification of other human beings—on his

shoulders and nailing it to the cross, **Jesus takes care of the part of our sin we could not take care of on our own—that we were powerless against.** He deals with our sin in ways that we had no ability to. And through doing that, he declares to us, his people: “sin has no hold on you any longer. Sin has no power over you any longer. You can be set free from the cycle of sin and shame through what Jesus accomplished for you on the cross.” Because **as strong as the draw towards sin is, it is not stronger than the power made available to us through Jesus.** Jesus breaks the cycle and sets us free. That is what he made possible for us.

Now, that’s not to say all that happens automatically or quickly. As we say a lot around here, our job now as followers of Jesus is to learn to live into the realities of what he made possible for us. So in light of how he has broken the cycle of shame, we now get to learn how to live out of that reality. Which brings us full circle back to Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 5—that followers of Jesus should now do whatever it takes to live into that freedom we’ve been given.

So let’s talk practically as we close about what it looks like to “cut off your hand” and “gouge out your eye.” What it looks like to do whatever it takes in the fight against porn. Here’s a few practical things that might be included in how to “cut off your hand,” which as a side note, has to be my favorite heading on a teaching slide ever.

## **1. Confess that porn is a problem.**

It’s almost guaranteed that **you will never get anywhere in your fight against porn if you never acknowledge it’s a problem.** The bible’s language for this is something called “confession.” When there is sin present in our lives, we *confess* it. That might make you ask “confess it to God? Or to other people?” The bible would answer that question with “yes. Both.” The book of James tells us, “confess your sins *to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*” So acknowledge it to God, but also to other people. Let people in on it. If that needs to start with just one person, that’s fine. But tell that one person. Tell them that you have a problem with porn. This is especially powerful for women that struggle with porn. The isolation *you* feel from the taboo around the subject is likely part of what’s keeping you shackled to it. Telling somebody can be one of the most helpful steps forward you can take.

Further than that, one thing that the guys in my LifeGroup even do is something we call “pre-confession.” Which is a totally made-up thing as far as the bible is concerned, but I think it’s helpful nonetheless. Pre-confession is when you tell other people, not just *after you looked at porn*, but also *when you think you might be tempted* to look at porn. So not just “last weekend I messed up and looked at porn,” but “hey this weekend my wife is out of town and I know there’s gonna be some times where I’m home by myself, from this time to this time—will you pray and check in with me around then?” So maybe try not just confession, but *pre-confession*. That’s part of what it looks like to “cut off your hand.”

And if someone confesses *to you*, thank them for doing that and ask how you can help.

## **2. Identify your triggers and form new responses.**

For most people, the desire to look at porn doesn’t just come out of nowhere. Usually we have certain experiences, or situations, or emotions, or *triggers* that make us run to porn as a make-shift “solution.” For you, it might be something like *anxiety*—when you’re really anxious and stressed out, you’re most

tempted to look at porn in those moments. Maybe it's *loneliness*—when you feel most alone, porn is how you cope with that. It could be any number of things.

Just to be very candid with you, the times in my life when I am most tempted to look at porn is simply when I'm bored. The problematic situations for me is when I have large blocks of unplanned, unscheduled time. So for me, part of "cutting off my hand" looks like using my time well. It looks like putting things on the calendar even when I don't really want to. It doesn't look like *overloading* my schedule, but it does look like not giving myself large blocks of unscheduled time where I'm alone—for me, that's setting myself up for disaster. Maybe it's boredom for you too. Whatever it is, identify the scenarios or emotions that make you run to porn.

Once you've identified them, ask "how might I let Jesus be for me what I'm looking to porn to be?" What if, when you're *anxious* and tempted to look at porn, you got out of there and went somewhere to pray through our anxiety instead? 1 Peter tells us that we should "cast all our anxieties on Jesus, because he cares for us." What if we ran to Jesus with our anxiety instead of to porn with it? Same with loneliness. What if, when we feel lonely and want to run to porn to cope with that, what if instead we used that opportunity to reach out to people in our LifeGroup, people at City Church that Jesus has put in our life to help fight against loneliness? What if we let that be the "solution," instead of believing that porn will be? **Once you know what makes you run to porn, you can figure out how to run to a more helpful place with those emotions.**

### **3. Go to extreme measures when extreme measures are needed.**

Let's remember how extreme Jesus gets in this passage: "if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out." Jesus seems to be under the impression that **there are no steps too drastic when it comes to fighting against lust. The people I've seen get the most freedom over porn have often been the people who will take it the most seriously.**

- Can't tell you how many guys I've known who have downgraded to an old-school flip phone because they just wanted to be done with the temptation to look at porn on their smartphone.
- If you're alone in the house and you're tempted, get out of the house—go for a walk or a drive.
- I had a roommate in college who knew he was tempted to look at porn late at night in his room, so he literally took the door to his room off its hinges.
- For me personally, I literally have restrictions set up to where I can't access certain websites and can't download *any* apps without my wife or Jeff typing in a passcode. Was actually really funny because I had to get Ana to type in a password just so I could access The God of Sex series page on the City Church website—it was flagged as inappropriate...

I know some of those may sound ridiculous. But for most of us in this room, there's probably still room to be more aggressive in the fight against lust and porn. And here's the thing: even though those sound ridiculous when it comes to porn, we wouldn't think it was ridiculous if an alcoholic took those kinds of steps to fight against alcoholism. We wouldn't think it was extreme if a drug addict took those kinds of steps against using—we would think it was *appropriate*. So listen, because Jesus knows that the draw towards lust is just as strong as those addictions (if not *moreso*), he also thinks its appropriate to take similar, *extreme* measures against it. **If you want to put up a fight with something as powerful as**



**porn, you've got to be willing to take extreme measures to do it.** But if you can bring yourself to do that, there's victory for the taking.

Here's my final push. I don't know about you guys, but I'm ready for followers of Jesus to be done with porn. I've seen it wreck too many lives, I've seen it destroy too many marriages, I've seen it kill too many people's love for Jesus, to just stand by while it continues to do all that. I'm ready for it to never be an issue in my life ever again. I'm ready for it to never be an issue in any of *your* lives ever again. So let's go to extreme measures if that's what it takes to be done with it, now and for good. Amen?

Let's pray.