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**A Holistic and Disciplined Fight**  
How a Theology of Embodiment Can Help Christian Men Fight  
the Temptation Toward Pornography

By  
Jason B. Jones

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry.

Saint Louis, Missouri

2025

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Graduation Date      May 16, 2025

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography. Pornography use has plagued Christians, and all of humanity, especially as recent technology has provided easy access to pornography.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with six Christian men, with an age range of 37-72. The interviews focused on gaining data with three research questions: 1) In what ways do Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies as a means of faithfully caring for the body the Lord has gifted them? 2) In what ways do Christian men engage in heart work to fight against the temptation to use pornography? 3) How do Christian men relate the physical stewardship of their bodies to their success in fighting the temptation to use pornography?

The literature review focused on three key areas to understand a theology of embodiment, a biblical framework for distorted human sexual desire, and a review of the literature accessible to a Christian man seeking to fight the temptation to view pornography.

This study concluded that a theology of embodiment, and the benefits of living it out, are missing from much of the literature addressing how Christian men should fight the temptation toward pornography use. Christian men may be missing something that could help in their fight against the temptation to view pornography. Pastors, churches, and seminaries could help teach and encourage men to fight against pornography temptation more holistically, with a theology of embodiment.

To the brave souls who have taught me so much.

They constantly forget, what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls. It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds; in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.

— C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*.

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## Acknowledgements

The idea for this dissertation began bombarding me during Dr. Dan Doriani's class, *Issues in Theology: Doctrine and Practices in the Body*. Over 30 years in the church, and I couldn't recall before then having heard what I was hearing in that class or reading what we were reading in Scripture with regard to the body. Thank you Dr. Doriani. You were instrumental in the beginning of this journey for me.

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Lastly, as a pastor for the last decade, I have spent time with so many men who struggle with the ongoing and persistent sin of pornography use. I've prayed with many. I've cried with many. I've sought the Lord with many. Thank you for sharing your lives with me. It was you in my mind as I began to be bombarded while sitting in Dr. Doriani's class. Flesh and blood always make a theological issue become more real and concrete.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Sex, and our sexuality as created human beings, is a beautiful gift given to us by the Lord. Pastors Deepak Reju and Jonathan Holmes echo this when they observe that sex is “God’s good gift to us.”<sup>1</sup> However, many men feel conflicted about their sexual desires. Greg,<sup>2</sup> for example, is exhausted because he has been fighting the temptation to use pornography since he was in his early teens. In every stage of his life, the temptation has been there, though its intensity waxes and wanes. He is 30 years old now and wonders if the temptation will ever leave. Greg has had accountability software on his computer for a while, but he knows ways around it. After meeting with pastors and Christian counselors, he walks away trying to work on his heart desires for pornography but soon falls again to the temptation. Greg wonders if he is missing something that might help.

## The Goodness

Sex has been a part of humanity since God created Adam and Eve as sexual beings and placed them in the Garden of Eden. Not long after the Lord created woman, Genesis 2:24 reveals that the man and woman “become one flesh.” While this verse is packed with more than just sexual union, it is not less than sexual union. The Lord

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<sup>1</sup> Deepak Reju and Jonathan Holmes, *Rescue Plan: Charting A Course To Restore Prisoners Of Pornography* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2021), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Greg is a composite character of real-life examples.

“intended for men and women to have sex in the context of a covenant relationship.”<sup>3</sup>

Scripture paints a picture of sex as a good gift from the Lord, not something bad within the world he created. Pastors Gerald Hiestand and Jay Thomas reinforce this by declaring, “Any approach to sexual standards that views sex as an evil to be avoided, rather than a gift to be celebrated, misses the mark and fails to capture the scriptural ideal.”<sup>4</sup>

Created as a good gift by the Lord, sex is to be enjoyed between a husband and wife. Scripture declares in various places that sexual pleasure between a husband and wife is a good thing, perhaps no stronger than in Song of Solomon. Professors Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones note that “The Song of Solomon celebrates the beauty of marital love including its intimate sexual expression.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, author and counselor David Powlison remarks, “Sexual love flourishes as a loving intimacy between a husband and wife.”<sup>6</sup> God designed sex to be a beautiful experience between husband and wife, but good designs in God’s creation did not stay that way.

## **The Corruption**

Article 1 of Chapter 6 in the Westminster Confession of Faith states, “Our first parents, being seduced by the subtilty and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the

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<sup>3</sup> Reju and Holmes, *Rescue Plan*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Hiestand and Jay Thomas, *Sex, Dating, and Relationships: A Fresh Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage and Family: Rebuilding The Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 53.

<sup>6</sup> David Powlison, *Making All Things New: Restoring Joy to the Sexually Broken* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 37.

forbidden fruit.”<sup>7</sup> Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, rejecting the rule of God over them. As such, the good designs of God’s creation no longer functioned entirely for good. Article 2 of Chapter 6 states, “By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.”<sup>8</sup> The great Reformer John Calvin writes: “All the parts of the soul were possessed by sin, ever since Adam revolted from the fountain of righteousness.”<sup>9</sup>

The sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden had devastating effects on human sexuality. Sexual immorality encompasses the distorted desires and misdirected actions within humanity’s broken sexuality. Ever since humanity’s longings turned against God and his good rule and reign, “desires are easily distorted and actions misdirected.”<sup>10</sup> Because of sin, “Sexual misbehavior is the new normal.”<sup>11</sup>

Digital media has proliferated the viewing of sex to the general public, making pornography easily accessible in most contexts. The ease of accessibility via smart phones and tablets makes the temptation stronger and capitulation easier. One study estimated that “46% of American men between ages 18 and 29 use or view pornography

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<sup>7</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms: As Adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America: With Proof Texts* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education and Publications Committee of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2007), 26.

<sup>8</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 153.

<sup>10</sup> Powlison, *Making All Things New*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> David Powlison, *Sexual Addiction: Freedom from Compulsive Behavior* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 5.

in a given week, 56% in a month, and 69% in a year.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, in a national study, researchers found that 47 percent of men and 16 percent of women reported intentional pornography use monthly.<sup>13</sup>

## **The Fight**

“Every time a struggler faces temptation, he feels as though a magnetic pull is dragging him back...He gets further enslaved. Sadly, this becomes *the* preeminent battle of his life.”<sup>14</sup> Reju and Holmes describe the temptation to use pornography as a battle or worse, a war that has lasted years and decades, often with little progress. Christian thinkers have written a fair amount in the last 10-15 years about fighting the temptation toward pornography. Many pastors, counselors, professors, and authors have contributed to the conversation, and much of the Christian content focuses on protecting against temptation and behavior, changing heart perspective, and finding a new identity in Christ. For example, in their book on addictions and recovery counseling, counselors Tim Clinton and Eric Scalise encourage, “Stop the behavior by establishing barriers that prevent or limit access to pornography.”<sup>15</sup> In his book on sexual addiction, Powlison urges, “Cry out to God for mercy. That’s one-half of the battle. The other way you fight

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Regnerus, David Gordon, and Joseph Price, “Documenting Pornography Use in America: A Comparative Analysis of Methodological Approaches,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 53, no. 7 (September 1, 2016): 873–881.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua B. Grubbs, Shane W. Kraus, and Samuel L. Perry, “Self-Reported Addiction to Pornography in a Nationally Representative Sample: The Roles of Use Habits, Religiousness, and Moral Incongruence,” *Journal of Behavioral Addictions* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 90.

<sup>14</sup> Reju and Holmes, *Rescue Plan*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Clinton and Eric Scalise, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Addictions And Recovery Counseling: 40 Topics, Spiritual Insights, and Easy-to-Use Action Steps* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 229.

sin is to flood your heart with light. When the room of your heart is filled with light, the shadows, the darkness, and the evil will be pushed out.”<sup>16</sup> In a similar way, John Freeman, author and president of Harvest USA, writes, “Only when your heart experiences love from a new source beyond anything it has ever known before will our heart start to move toward that source. It’ll start to be deeply changed, and that is the only way.”<sup>17</sup> Comparably, Bible teacher and church planter Tim Chester mentions five ingredients for the battle against pornography:

a hatred of porn itself (not just the shame it brings) and a longing for change...a desire for God, arising from a confidence that he offers more than porn...an assurance that you are loved by God and right with God through faith in the work of Jesus...a commitment to do all in your power to avoid temptation, starting with controls on your computer...a community of Christians who are holding you accountable and supporting you in your struggle.<sup>18</sup>

Chester offers a battle plan shaped by having the right theology, committing inwardly to avoid sinning, and having a community around believers to hold them accountable. Thus, much Christian literature on how to fight the temptation to use pornography focuses on heart change, behavior modification, and accountability.

Like much of the Christian literature, the Bible does state that the core of the problem resides in the heart. In their book titled *How People Change*, counselors Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp affirm, “All of the ways in which the Bible refers to the inner person (mind, emotions, spirit, soul, will, etc.) are summed up with this one term:

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<sup>16</sup> Powlison, *Sexual Addiction*, 17.

<sup>17</sup> John Freeman, *Hide Or Seek: When Men Get Real With God About Sex* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2014), 119.

<sup>18</sup> Tim Chester, *Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2010), 141.

heart.”<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah 17:9 declares, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” The heart work against the temptation to use pornography is addressed in the thinking and writing of Christian authors, pastors, and theologians. Is there, however, something missing in how Christians have interpreted the whole of Scripture on ways to fight sin? Has Christian thought and literature addressed only one side of a coin? Might the physical body help play a role in fighting the temptation toward pornography use?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography.

Professor Gregg Allison, in his book *Embodied*, reflects, “Embodiment is an essential feature of God’s creation of us as human beings.”<sup>20</sup> He defines embodiment in two ways. First, embodiment is “simply having or being in a body.”<sup>21</sup> His second definition states, “Embodiment is a field of study that explores how people are present bodily and engage physically in the world.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change*, 2nd ed. (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>20</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021), 31.

<sup>21</sup> Allison, *Embodied*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Allison, *Embodied*, 14.



The components of the human “heart,” used metaphorically, are encapsulated by the physical person, which God also created. Carl Trueman, professor of biblical and religious studies, observes the problem of separating “heart” from the body. “There is no ‘I’ behind or before the body. There is no ‘us’ that exists (logically, let alone chronologically) independently of our flesh and that is then randomly assigned to the bodies we have. Our bodies are an integral part of who we are.”<sup>23</sup> The body carries out what the heart wants. As professor Dan Doriani observes, echoing Trueman, “Flesh, blood, heart, and mind are interdependent. Our bodies are *us*.”<sup>24</sup>

In his book, *Wonder-Fully Made*, professor and author John Kleinig remarks on the interconnection between heart and body. “Human beings do not possess a body or a mind; they are both bodies and minds. They cannot be reduced to either of these.”<sup>25</sup> In Kleinig’s thought, the mind is a part of the soul. He summarizes, “It could be said that Scripture speaks about embodied minds and mindful bodies.”<sup>26</sup>

How does one uphold a theology of embodiment when thinking about how Christians are to fight the battle when tempted to use pornography? How does one account for the body’s involvement? What might be the relationship between the physical stewardship and discipline of the human body and the fight of the heart against pornography temptation? Answers to these questions could provide significant help.

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<sup>23</sup> Carl Trueman “The Triumph of the Social Scientific Method,” *First Things*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/06/the-triumph-of-the-social-scientific-method>.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *The New Man: Becoming A Man After God’s Heart*, New ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 205.

<sup>25</sup> John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 9.

<sup>26</sup> Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 7.

As discussed previously, much Christian literature on how to fight the temptation to use pornography primarily focuses on heart change, behavior modification, and accountability. While this literature focuses on a fundamental aspect of this struggle, there is little mention of how a theology of embodiment might aid in the fight against pornography temptation and use.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the qualitative research:

1. In what ways do Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies as a means of faithfully caring for the body the Lord has gifted them?
2. In what ways do Christian men engage in heart work to fight against the temptation to use pornography?
3. How do Christian men relate the physical stewardship of their bodies to their success in fighting the temptation to use pornography?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has significance for many who are affected by the ongoing struggle with the temptation to view pornography. The experiences and suggestions from Christians who have successfully battled the temptation to view pornography from an embodied perspective, body and heart, could provide encouragement and new aid for many with a pornography addiction.

A further understanding of the relationship between the body and the heart regarding pornography temptation might keep the teenager caught in the web of pornography from slipping into despair. The adult who has warred against pornography

temptation for decades may finally experience a newfound success from the findings of this research. The newly married husband or wife may avoid starting their marriage under the weight of the effects of persistent pornography temptation. The couple married for 30 years may have a more joyous marriage and sexual intimacy because pornography doesn't grip one or both so viciously.

Lastly, the findings of this study could help pastors and counselors as they walk with people in the church body who are struggling with the temptation to use pornography. The understanding and best practices unearthed from this study may give pastors and counselors another piece of the puzzle that would help someone fighting the heart fight against pornography.

### **Definition of Terms**

In this study, key terms are defined as follows:

Disciplines – At times in the study, the word “disciplines” is used in order to capture the idea of both physical and spiritual disciplines together.

Fight(ing) – To battle; to war against the disordered desires of human sin, often spoken or acted out through the body. Fighting is engaged with the entire being, body and heart/soul.

Heart – “All of the ways in which the Bible refers to the inner person (mind, emotions, spirit, soul, will, etc.) are summed up with this one term: *heart*.”<sup>27</sup> As such, heart, soul and spirit are understood and used interchangeably throughout the study.

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<sup>27</sup> Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 14.

Holism – “A theory that the universe and esp. living nature is correctly seen in terms of interacting wholes (as of living organisms) that are more than the mere sum of elementary principles.”<sup>28</sup>

Holistic – “Relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems rather than with the analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts.”<sup>29</sup>

Inward/Inward work– Work to be done on the immaterial aspect of the person.

Heart work to be done in the soul, as opposed to work that a person does on the material aspect of who they are (i.e. the body).

Physical discipline – Practices engaged in to care for the physical, material aspect of what the Lord created in humans, the body. While not an exhaustive list, this could include various forms of exercise, healthy diet choices, and choices that encourage better sleep habits. For instance, staying off of phones and computers leading up to bedtime and not staying up excessively late for multiple nights in a row. Physical discipline is any practice that a person engages in to care for and train the material aspect of who they are.

Pornography – “**1:** The depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement **2:** Material (as books or a photograph) that depicts erotic behavior and is intended to cause sexual excitement **3:** The depiction of acts in a sensational manner so as to arouse a quick intense emotional reaction.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10 ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1998), 553.

<sup>29</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 553.

<sup>30</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 907.

Pressure – “The application of force to something by something else.”<sup>31</sup> In the case of this study, the pressure in mind is the application of force that the heart puts on the body to act, and the application of force that the body puts on the heart to respond in certain ways.

Spiritual discipline – Similar to physical discipline, spiritual discipline are practices engaged in to care for, change, and train the heart/soul/spirit of a person to come under the rule and reign of God and his Kingdom. While not an exhaustive list, this could include prayer, bible reading, fasting, and Scripture memorization. Spiritual discipline is any practice that a person engages in to train the heart/soul/spirit to joyfully obey what the Lord declares to be true and good in his Word.

Temptation – the desire, the urge, or the enticement to get something, to do something, to engage in something, or to use something that goes against how God created human beings to flourish and to obey God’s loving purposes.

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<sup>31</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 923.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this study is to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography.

The literature review focuses on three relevant areas of literature to provide a foundation for the qualitative research. The review begins with a focus on the theology of human embodiment, beginning with literature related to Platonic and Gnostic thought on the body and its implications for today. The literature review continues with a study of Scripture passages to provide a biblical framework for the goodness of human sexuality, as well as a framework for how human desires became distorted. Specific focus is given to sexual immorality as a byproduct of distorted human desire. The third area of literature focus is related to historic Christian thought on how to fight sin, as well as current Christian psychological thought on how to fight the temptation to use pornography. This final section of the literature review ends with a focus on literature within the field of neuroscience, particularly literature related to how pornography affects the brain and how the brain heals.

#### **A Theology of Embodiment**

Before diving into the literature related to human embodiment, the review will focus on Platonic and Gnostic thought, particularly as it pertains to the body. As theologian Matthew Lee Anderson observes, “Traditional evangelicalism has deeply

Gnostic tendencies.”<sup>32</sup> Professor Michael Horton concurs, “It would seem that the critics of modern American religion are basically on target in describing the entire religious landscape, from New Age or liberal, to evangelical and Pentecostal, as essentially Gnostic.”<sup>33</sup> In this study, addressing Platonic and Gnostic thought will lay the foundation for the importance of more recent work done on human embodiment. Next, the literature review will focus on the significance that Scripture places on the body, as opposed to Platonic and Gnostic thought. The final section of this portion of the literature review will discuss a theology of human embodiment.

### *Plato*

“Behold! human beings living in an underground den...here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads.”<sup>34</sup> In his philosophical treatise *Republic*, Plato speaks in allegory about humans living in a cave. He refers to the bound human beings as “prisoners.”<sup>35</sup> In another of Plato’s works, *Phaedo*, he elaborates on his understanding of the “underground den” and why humans are in chains. Speaking through his character Socrates, Plato writes, “What is purification but the separation of the soul from the body, as I was saying before; the habit of the soul

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<sup>32</sup> Matthew Lee Anderson, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter To Our Faith* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2011), 37.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Horton, “Gnostic Worship,” *Modern Reformation*, July/August 1995: 13–21.

<sup>34</sup> Plato, *Plato: Five Great Dialogues*, ed. Louise Ropes Loomis, trans. B. Jowett, Classics Club (New York: Walter J. Black, 1942), 398.

<sup>35</sup> *Plato: Five Great Dialogues*, 398.

gathering and collecting herself into herself from all sides out of the body; the dwelling in her own place alone, as in another life, so also in this, as far as she can; the release of the soul from the chains of the body.”<sup>36</sup> Theologian Paula Gooder points out, “Like Pythagoras, Plato believed in the transmigration of the soul so that the soul could exist in many different bodies. This means that for Plato, and his adherents, a particular body did not shape human identity because the soul could exist in a range of bodies.”<sup>37</sup>

In another place in *Phaedo*, Plato espouses, “The soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intellectual, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable; and that the body is in the very likeness of the human, and mortal, and unintellectual, and multiform, and dissoluble, and changeable.”<sup>38</sup> Theologian N.T. Wright remarks, “For Plato, the present world of space, time, and matter is a world of illusion, of flickering shadows in a cave.”<sup>39</sup> Platonic thought summed up the relationship between body and soul with the phrase *soma-sema*. According to historian Christian Irigaray, *soma-sema* “is a short play of words which literally means ‘body-prison,’” and exposes the notion that “The body is the prison of the soul.”<sup>40</sup> Professor Brooke Holmes concludes, “Plato does play a decisive role in the history of philosophy in establishing

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<sup>36</sup> Plato: *Five Great Dialogues*, 97.

<sup>37</sup> Paula Gooder, *Body: Biblical Spirituality for the Whole Person* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2016), 20.

<sup>38</sup> Plato: *Five Great Dialogues*, 114.

<sup>39</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 88.

<sup>40</sup> Christian Irigaray, “Soma Sema: The Body as a Prison for the Soul,” Academia.edu (n.d.), accessed October 4, 2024, [https://www.academia.edu/33117741/Soma\\_Sema\\_The\\_Body\\_as\\_a\\_Prison\\_for\\_the\\_Soul](https://www.academia.edu/33117741/Soma_Sema_The_Body_as_a_Prison_for_the_Soul).



body and soul as a pair wherein the latter is superior to the former.”<sup>41</sup> Plato understands the soul to be good, while the body is bad. As such, his philosophy is largely around the improvement of the soul, without care for the material aspect of the human.

Plato, and his teaching on the body, plays a pivotal role in the philosophical roots of Gnostic thought. Scholar Birger Pearson points out, “From ancient times it has been averred that the Gnostics derived their basic ideas from the Greek philosophers, especially Pythagoras and Plato.”<sup>42</sup> Later in his journal article, Pearson writes, “It can hardly be doubted that the ingredients of the Gnostic religion in its origins and early history included a substantial dose of popular Platonism.”<sup>43</sup>

### *Gnostic Thought*

“Gnosticism was a second-century movement that has persisted in various forms and places throughout church history,”<sup>44</sup> notes Anderson. Allison explains, “With roots in ancient (pre-Christian) philosophy, Gnosticism is the perspective that spiritual, immaterial realities are inherently good, while physical, material realities are inherently evil.”<sup>45</sup> That ancient, pre-Christian philosophy was Platonism. Agreeing with Allison, Gooder notes that Gnosticism “sought to reject anything to do with the evil physical

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<sup>41</sup> Justin E.H. Smith, *Embodiment: A History*, Oxford Philosophical Concepts (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 41.

<sup>42</sup> Birger A. Pearson, “Gnosticism as Platonism: With Special Reference to Marsanes (NHC 10,1),” *The Harvard Theological Review* 77, no. 1 (January 1, 1984): 55.

<sup>43</sup> Pearson, “Gnosticism as Platonism,” 56.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, *Earthen Vessels*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Allison, *Embodied*, 25.

world and, instead, to embrace only those things which they saw as purely spiritual.”<sup>46</sup> Theologian Herman Bavinck notes, “Gnosticism was a particularly powerful attempt to absorb Christianity...the main question was how the human spirit had fallen into the bonds of matter and could now be delivered from these bonds. Matter, the cause of evil, cannot be explained as coming from God.”<sup>47</sup> Echoing Bavinck, professor Nancy Pearcey explains, “Ancient pagan culture was permeated by world-denying philosophies such as Manichaeism, Platonism, and Gnosticism, all of which disparaged the material world as the realm of death, decay, and destruction—the source of evil.”<sup>48</sup> Professor Peter Brown notes that Gnosticism “trained the minds of educated people to ignore the body, as a total other to the self.”<sup>49</sup>

Gnosticism, as noted by Anderson, “has persisted in various forms and places throughout church history.”<sup>50</sup> Wright traces the thread connecting Plato through Gnosticism to Christian thought: “The roots of the misunderstanding go very deep, not least into the residual Platonism that has infected whole swaths of Christian thinking and has misled people into supposing that Christians are meant to devalue this present world and our present bodies and regard them as shabby and shameful.”<sup>51</sup> In discussing the

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<sup>46</sup> Gooder, *Body*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged In One Volume*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 31–32.

<sup>48</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions About Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 35.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body And Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Columbia Classics In Religion (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008), lix.

<sup>50</sup> Anderson, *Earthen Vessels*, 37.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 18.

mixture of Gnostic thought into Christianity, Bavinck argues, “These ideas were harmonized with Scripture by allegorical exegesis and presented in forms and images derived from mythology and adorned by fanciful imagination.”<sup>52</sup> Bavinck comments further on the influence of Gnosticism on Christianity by stating, “They changed Christianity from a history to an idea, into a speculative philosophy, which has exerted its influence throughout the centuries.”<sup>53</sup> According to Allison, that influence goes right up until the present time: “Sadly, Gnosticism continues to infect us today and leads to disregard for the body.”<sup>54</sup> Highlighting the influence of Gnosticism on preachers, author Wendell Berry speaks through one of the characters, “In most of them I saw the old division of body and soul...Everything bad was laid on the body, and everything good was credited to the soul.”<sup>55</sup>

### *The Creation of Humans*

Scripture espouses a different understanding of the body, as opposed to Plato and the Gnostics. In reviewing Scripture’s treatment of the human body, “The place to begin, of course, is at the beginning.”<sup>56</sup> As professor John Kleinig reveals, “Our vision of the human body cannot be separated from what God himself tells us about its creation.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 32.

<sup>53</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Allison, *Embodied*, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow: The Life Story of Jayber Crow, Barber, of the Port William Membership, as Written by Himself* (New York: Counterpoint, 2000), 49.

<sup>56</sup> Anderson, *Earthen Vessels*, 58.

<sup>57</sup> Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 23.

Genesis 1:26 declares, “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”

Moses, the author of Genesis, then states again in Genesis 1:27, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

Commenting on Genesis 1:26, Bavinck reasons, “Humanity, where the spiritual and material world are joined together, is the crowning culmination of creation.”<sup>58</sup> Echoing Bavinck, surgeon Paul Brand remarks, “Among all earthly creatures, only humanity receives the image of God.”<sup>59</sup> Bavinck adds, “The whole person is the image of the whole deity.”<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Bible commentator Derek Kidner notes, “When we try to define the image of God, it is not enough to react against a crude literalism by isolating man’s mind and spirit from his body. The Bible makes man a unity.”<sup>61</sup> Using Genesis 1 to critique Platonic and Gnostic thought, Kleinig argues, “All that follows in the rest of the Bible and its account of God’s dealing with humanity presupposes God’s approval of the human body. Thus, any disparagement of it as something bad, or contempt for it as unfit for God, is ruled out of order by the first chapter of the Bible.”<sup>62</sup>

Genesis 2 gives a more intimate account of the creation of humans. Genesis 2:7 paints a picture: “The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” Bavinck asserts,

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<sup>58</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 311.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully: The Marvel of Bearing God’s Image*, updated and combined ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 13.

<sup>60</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 319.

<sup>61</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Chicago, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 51.

<sup>62</sup> Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 25.

“The body is not a prison, but a marvelous piece of art from the hand of God Almighty.”<sup>63</sup> Relatedly, Pearcey argues that Genesis “teaches that matter was not created by an evil sub-deity but by the ultimate deity, the Most High God—and that the material world is therefore intrinsically good.”<sup>64</sup> Furthering her point, Pearcey adds, “It was this walking, animated clay that God pronounced ‘very good.’”<sup>65</sup>

In Psalm 139:13-16, the psalmist proclaims to the Lord, “You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made...My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance.” Commenting on Psalm 139, Allison emphasizes, “Not only did God once create an original pair of human beings, and not only does God continue to create human beings; God also personally creates each and every individual.”<sup>66</sup> Similarly, preacher Charles Spurgeon declares, “That we have eyes, and ears, and hands, and feet, is all due to the wise and gracious purpose of heaven: it was so ordered in the secret decree by which all things are as they are. God’s purposes concern our limbs and faculties.”<sup>67</sup> Allison concurs by adding, “He is intimately engaged in each and every aspect, the minute and large details, of embodied creation.”<sup>68</sup> Capturing this in her own way, author

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<sup>63</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 327.

<sup>64</sup> Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 36.

<sup>65</sup> Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 36.

<sup>66</sup> Allison, *Embodied*, 29.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Classic Reflections on the Wisdom of the Psalms*, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 263.

<sup>68</sup> Allison, *Embodied*, 29–30.

Frederica Mathewes-Green confirms, “If there is a Creator, he created us in bodies. Further, he created each body unique, specially crafted for each person.”<sup>69</sup>

In reflection on Psalm 139, Kleinig suggests, “Our world has many living wonders, many ordinary creatures that are all quite extraordinary...From every point of view, each embodied person is the most amazing visible being on earth.”<sup>70</sup> More than a century before Kleinig, Spurgeon asks, “Who can gaze even upon a model of our anatomy without wonder and awe? Who could dissect a portion of the human frame without marveling at its delicacy, and trembling at its frailty?”<sup>71</sup> In similar fashion, author Sam Allberry remarks, “Were we to know the full extent of the intricacy of God’s workmanship, we would rightly be in awe.”<sup>72</sup> The workmanship that Allberry mentions is, as Bavinck observed, the whole person (body and soul) imaging the whole deity.<sup>73</sup>

### *Reflection on Embodiment*

Allison emphasizes, “On the basis of these biblical affirmations, an important theological reflection is that embodiment is an essential feature of God’s creation of us as human beings.”<sup>74</sup> The biblical affirmations referred to by Allison are the accounts of Genesis 1 and 2, as well as Psalm 139. Allison adds, “Embodiment is the proper state of

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<sup>69</sup> Frederica Mathewes-Green, “The Subject Was Noses,” *Books and Culture*, Jan/Feb 1997, <https://www.booksandculture.com/articles/1997/janfeb/7b1014.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3:262.

<sup>72</sup> Sam Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel Is Good News for Our Physical Selves* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 24.

<sup>73</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 319.

<sup>74</sup> Allison, *Embodied*, 31.

human existence,”<sup>75</sup> and, therefore, “Human existence as embodied is natural and normal.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, a theology of human embodiment comes from Scripture.

This statement begs the question: what is embodiment? A simple definition is offered by Allison: “Embodiment is the condition of being a body or having a body.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Smith says that embodiment is “having, being in, or being associated with a body.”<sup>78</sup> To elaborate, Kleinig notes, “It could be said that Scripture speaks about embodied minds and mindful bodies.”<sup>79</sup> In another place, he observes, “We human beings are not just spirits, like the angels, nor animated bodies, like the animals, but are embodied spirits, or, if you will, spiritual bodies.”<sup>80</sup> Allison adds, “Human nature is complex, consisting of both an immaterial aspect and a material aspect.”<sup>81</sup> A deeper dive into these two aspects provides a better idea of the immaterial and material aspects.

### **Body and Soul (Heart)**

Many Christian authors believe the Bible refers to human beings as having two parts. Counselor Winston Smith points out, “At the most general level the Bible makes a

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<sup>75</sup> Gregg R. Allison, “A Theology of Human Embodiment,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 63, no. 2 (2021): 69.

<sup>76</sup> Allison, “A Theology of Human Embodiment,” 71.

<sup>77</sup> Allison, *Embodied*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *Embodiment*, 1.

<sup>79</sup> Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 7.

<sup>80</sup> Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 4.

<sup>81</sup> Allison, “A Theology of Human Embodiment,” 66.

distinction between the “outer” and the “inner” man.”<sup>82</sup> At times, the “inner” man is referred to as the soul, spirit, or heart. The first indication is found in Genesis 2:7. “The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” In this account, the Lord forms the material aspect (body) of man from the dust and then breathes the immaterial aspect (heart/soul) of man into his physical creation. Similarly, speaking of the death of humans, Ecclesiastes 12:7 declares that at death, “The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to the God who gave it.” Allison describes the two parts like this: “*Body* is the material aspect of human nature...the other—often called the soul or spirit—being the immaterial aspect.”<sup>83</sup> Counselor Paul Tripp echoes, “Scripture divides the human being into two parts, the inner and outer being. The outer person is your physical self; the inner person is your spiritual self.”<sup>84</sup> Doriani adds, “God created mankind as a body-soul unity.”<sup>85</sup>

Counselors Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp have spoken of the “inner” aspect of humans using the phrase “heart.” They write, “All of the ways in which the Bible refers to the inner person (mind, emotions, spirit, soul, will, etc.) are summed up with this one term: *heart*.”<sup>86</sup> Tripp comments in a different book, “The synonym the Bible most often

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<sup>82</sup> Winston Smith, “Dichotomy or Trichotomy? How the Doctrine of Man Shapes the Treatment of Depression,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 18, no. 3 (2000): 23.

<sup>83</sup> Allison, *Embodied*, 13–14.

<sup>84</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Instruments In The Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*, Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 59.

<sup>85</sup> Doriani, *The New Man*, 201.

<sup>86</sup> Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 14.



uses for the inner being is the heart.”<sup>87</sup> One of the places that the Bible refers to the heart is in 1 Samuel 16. In verse 7, the Lord declares to Samuel, “The Lord sees not as man sees, man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” Another reference is found in Jeremiah 17:9-10: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.” In speaking to the disciples, Jesus taught, “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart...out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander,” as recorded in Matthew 15:18-19.

In their book, Lane and Tripp suggest, “The heart is the real or essential you.”<sup>88</sup> In his own writing, Tripp similarly asserts, “The heart is the ‘real’ you. It is the essential core of who you are.”<sup>89</sup> He elaborates, “Though we put a tremendous amount of effort on the outer person, we all recognize that the true person is the person within. For example, when you say that you are getting to know someone, you are not saying that you have a deeper knowledge of his ears or nose! You are talking about the inner person, the heart.”<sup>90</sup> The diagram below is taken from *Caring for One Another* by Ed Welch. Regarding the diagram, Welch points out, “Notice in the diagram that the arrow moves back and forth between all those things outside of us and our hearts. Our bodies, our work, our wealth, our culture, other people, and even spiritual forces are all in engaged in

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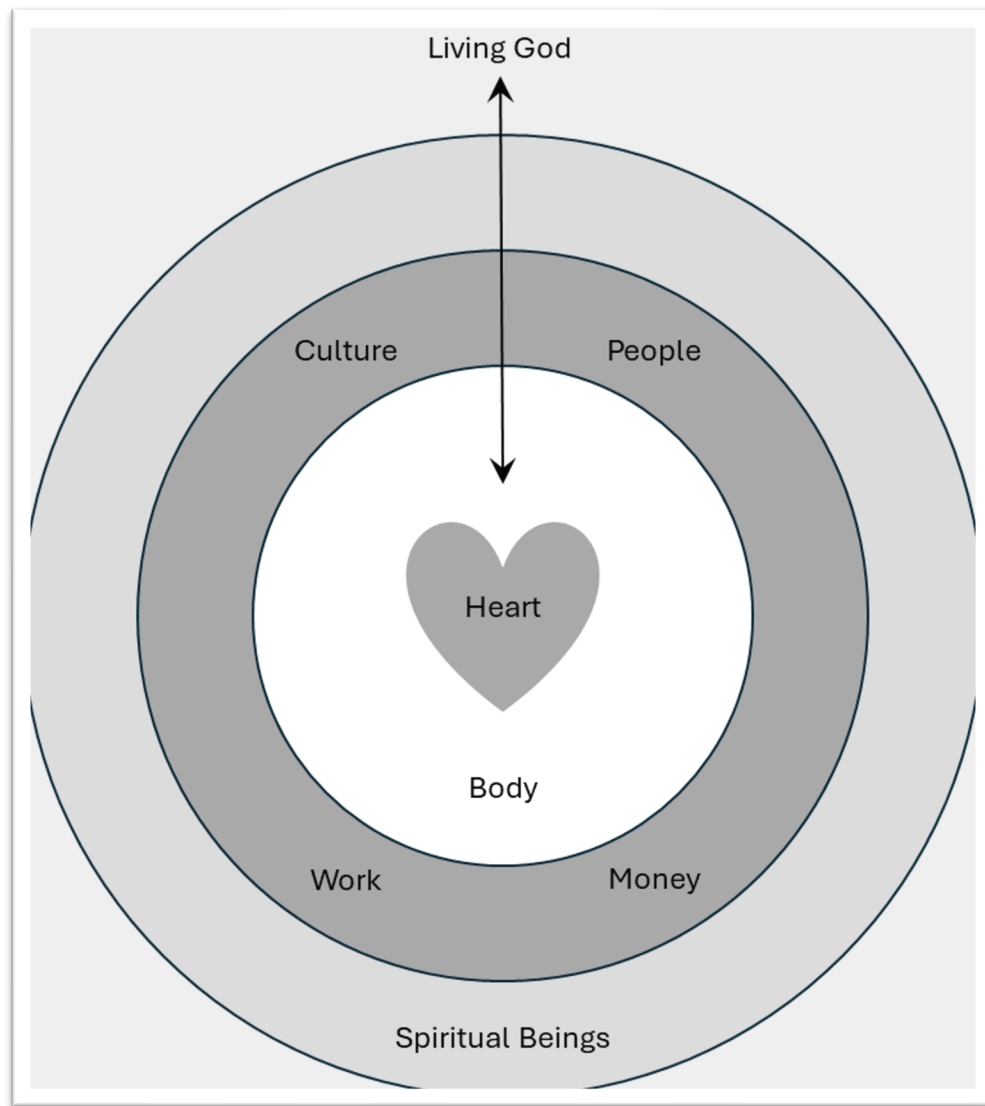
<sup>87</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 59.

<sup>88</sup> Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 14.

<sup>89</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 59.

<sup>90</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 59.

negotiations with our hearts.”<sup>91</sup> At the heart level, he says, identity is deepest. He indicates that while a body-soul unity exists, the soul, or heart, is the real person.



**Figure 1:** A diagram from Ed Welch’s book, *Caring for One Another*.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Caring for One Another: 8 Ways to Cultivate Meaningful Relationships* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 34.

<sup>92</sup> Welch, *Caring for One Another*, 34.

In contrast to Lane, Tripp, and Welch, Doriani offers, “Our bodies are *us*. When we see a friend, we don’t say, ‘I see *Mark’s body*’; we say, ‘I see Mark.’”<sup>93</sup> Author Michael Frost observes, “We *are* our bodies. We don’t live *in* our bodies.”<sup>94</sup> Allberry agrees, “In the Bible, our body is not an accessory to who we are; it is part of who we are... Your body is not other than you. It is not just a receptacle for you. It *is* you.”<sup>95</sup> Mathewes-Green emphasizes, “We are not merely passengers riding around in skintight race cars, sometimes pleased and sometimes grumpy; we are our bodies. They embody us.”<sup>96</sup> These authors express something different from Lane, Tripp and Welch, who express that the heart is the real, or essential, person. Perhaps unknowingly, some portions of Christianity have allowed Plato and the Gnostics to have influence over how to conceive of what a human is? If so, would that give direction over how humans are to fight sin? Is the ‘heart’ or the ‘inner man’ the real *person*? Or does a full, embodied self, inner and outer, encompass the totality of who one is and what one does?

### **The Whole Person**

In her book, *Body*, Gooder focuses on the writings of the Apostle Paul and how he addressed the body. She emphasizes, “When looking at Paul we cannot and should not assume that when he uses the word ‘soul’ he means something that is fundamentally

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<sup>93</sup> Doriani, *The New Man*, 205.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Frost, *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 53.

<sup>95</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 41.

<sup>96</sup> Mathewes-Green, “The Subject Was Noses.”

different from or opposed to the body.”<sup>97</sup> This understanding views humans as a whole when the word ‘soul’ is used and does not take the word to mean only the “inner” person or the heart. She adds, “Instead his use of the word incorporates the body, pushing us to recognize that for Paul both the word ‘body’ and ‘soul’ are neutral and describe who we are as people – bodies animated by a vital life force.”<sup>98</sup> Likewise, professor John Frame reasons, “Spirit, soul, and body should not be understood as metaphysical components of man, as distinct entities within us, battling for supremacy. Rather, each refers to the whole person from a particular perspective.”<sup>99</sup> Similar to Gooder, Frame highlights that the body is not fundamentally different from or opposed to the soul. Frame adds, “What the body does is not distinct from, let alone in conflict with, what the soul and spirit do.”<sup>100</sup> The body is not distinct from what the heart is and does, nor is the heart, to the exclusion of the body, the real *person*.

### *Summary of A Theology of Embodiment*

A historical understanding of how the body has been viewed helps shape the context for how the body is viewed in the current day. Platonism and Gnosticism each have held a negative view of the material body, and Platonic thought, as well as Gnostic thought, shaped Christian thought for centuries. Some Christians concluded that the soul, or heart, was of greater worth, value, or importance than the physical body, which the

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<sup>97</sup> Gooder, *Body*, 41.

<sup>98</sup> Gooder, *Body*, 41.

<sup>99</sup> John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 799.

<sup>100</sup> Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 799.

Lord created and called “very good.” A bifurcation of the human being has lurked throughout Christian thought since. Many present-day Christian men approach the fight against pornography temptation as bifurcated humans, as if the fight against pornography temptation is waged only within the inner man. In more recent years, literature has affirmed that humans are created as embodied creatures, with a physical body encapsulating an immaterial soul. This literature highlights truth that runs throughout Scripture: the Lord cares about the body, as well as the soul. As such, the purpose of this study is to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography.

### **A Biblical Framework for Distorted Desires**

Genesis 1 records the Lord, like Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia*,<sup>101</sup> singing creation into existence from nothing. According to Genesis 1:27, after creating the other animals, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” While being made from dust like the other animals (Genesis 1:24 and Genesis 2:7), something makes humans different from the other animals. Kidner mentions that man, “shares the sixth day with other creatures, is made of dust as they are (2:7,19), feeds as they feed (1:29,30) and reproduces with a blessing similar to theirs...But the stress falls on his distinctness.”<sup>102</sup> Relatedly, author David Atkinson emphasizes, “To be ‘in the image of God’ or perhaps better ‘as the image of God’ then, is...about the relationship that God has towards us, and—in a derivative way,

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<sup>101</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 112–126.

<sup>102</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 50.

of our relationship of sonship to the Father.”<sup>103</sup> Kidner bolsters this notion by stating that man’s “crowning glory is his relation to God.”<sup>104</sup> What makes humans distinct from the rest of creation is their unique relationship to the Lord.

Genesis 1:31 declares that after his creation and blessing of man and woman, the Lord “saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” At the end of the other days of creation, the Lord pronounces what he had created as good. Human beings added to everything else the Lord had created and made the entire creation “very good.” Kidner notes, “If the details of His work were pronounced ‘good’ (4,10,12,18,21,25), the whole is *very good*.”<sup>105</sup> Atkinson adds, “Before anything is said about evil, or pain, or sin, or disorder, we need to first hear this note of excited pleasure. What God made is good!”<sup>106</sup> Frame emphasizes that Adam and Eve’s “very nature pleased him. They were good people, good servants of God. They bore God’s image without distortion.”<sup>107</sup>

Before the entrance of sin into humanity, Genesis 2:23 records that the man delighted in the creation of woman, and that “therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (2:24).” The “very” goodness of God’s creation also includes sexual union between the man and woman that he created. Atkinson notes, “Although the Christian church often seems to have had trouble with sex, the Old Testament tells us that sexual relationships are good, to be

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<sup>103</sup> David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11: The Dawn of Creation*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 38.

<sup>104</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 50.

<sup>105</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 53.

<sup>106</sup> Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis*, 42.

<sup>107</sup> Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 845.

rejoiced in and affirmed.”<sup>108</sup> Reju and Holmes concur by noting that sex is “God’s good gift to us. As the sovereign Creator of humanity, God designed our bodies for good and godly purposes, which includes sex.”<sup>109</sup> Atkinson adds, “The delight of Genesis 2:23 is followed immediately by the narrator’s comment in 2:24. It could not be said more clearly that marriage is the context of committed love in which the fully physical expression of sexual relationship is meant to belong.”<sup>110</sup> Reju and Holmes concur, “From the beginning, God intended for men and women to have sex in the context of a covenant relationship.”<sup>111</sup> Within the context of a marriage between a man and a woman, sex was given by the Lord, and he called it “very good.”

### *Very Good Things Distorted*

Genesis 2:25 proclaims, “The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” Neither the man nor the woman had anything to hide. Before the presence of the Lord, and between one another, they were whole. Things were as they should be. No disobedience. No shame. No brokenness to their bodies or their sexuality. No distorted desires, sexual or otherwise.

Question 21 in the Westminster Larger Catechism asks, “Did man continue in that estate wherein God created him?” The answer in the catechism: “Our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will, through the temptation of Satan, transgressed the

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<sup>108</sup> Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis*, 74.

<sup>109</sup> Reju and Holmes, *Rescue Plan*, 24.

<sup>110</sup> Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis*, 74.

<sup>111</sup> Reju and Holmes, *Rescue Plan*, 24.

commandment of God in eating the forbidden fruit; and thereby fell from the estate of innocence wherein they were created.”<sup>112</sup>

In the Garden of Eden, the Lord had given Adam and Eve a world of “yes,” with one “no.” Genesis 2:16-17 states, “The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” Enter the serpent in Genesis 3. He was crafty. Kidner refers to his craftiness as, “malevolent brilliance.”<sup>113</sup> A genius of evil. The serpent knows how to deceive and trick Adam and Eve, and deceive he does. The serpent “asks” the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden (Genesis 3:1)?’” Atkinson asserts, “The serpent began the conversation in the seemingly harmless terms of a discussion about God.” Similarly, Kidner remarks, “The tempter begins with suggestion rather than argument. The incredulous tone — ‘So God has actually said...?’—is both disturbing and flattering; it smuggles in the assumption that God’s word is subject to our judgment.”<sup>114</sup> In his craftiness, to get Adam and Eve to move toward disobedience to God, the serpent persuades them toward doubting God and his goodness.

Genesis 3:6 says, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” Adam and Eve rejected the rule and reign of God over them by eating of the fruit which

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<sup>112</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms*, 169.

<sup>113</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 67.

<sup>114</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 67.



he specifically had instructed them not to eat. Genesis 3:7 reveals, “The eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.” Immediately, something in Adam and Eve had been distorted. Corrupted. The Westminster Confession of Faith charges, “By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.”<sup>115</sup>

### **Wholly defiled**

What does it mean that humans became wholly defiled? Genesis 6:5 answers, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Even after the flood of Genesis 6 and 7, the Lord declares in Genesis 8:21, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” There is an overarching and totalizing nature in these verses, a sense in which the intention of the entire person is wholly distorted and corrupt. In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul goes so far as to state, “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” Additionally, Paul asserts in Ephesians 4:18 that those who do not know God are “darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them.” Sin corrupts every aspect of human identity.

Reformation theologian John Calvin defines original sin as, “a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature,”<sup>116</sup> where “hereditary” denotes that sin has been

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<sup>115</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms*, 26.

<sup>116</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 152.

passed to all of Adam's posterity since the Garden of Eden. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, to be depraved is "to pervert...to make bad...to corrupt...to debase...marked by corruption or evil."<sup>117</sup> Calvin makes the case that human nature is wholly marked by corruption, or evil. Puritan pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards explains, "The great depravity of man's nature appears, not only in that they universally commit sin, who spend any long time in the world; but in that men are naturally so prone to sin, that none ever fail of *immediately* transgressing God's will...as soon as they are capable of it."<sup>118</sup> With phrases like "great depravity" and "immediately transgressing," Edwards describes the human state as being wholly defiled after Adam and Eve's sin. Like Calvin and Edwards, professor John Murray emphasizes, "Man is totally unholy...Man's understanding is darkened, his will enslaved, his conscience perverted, his affections depraved, his heart corrupted, his mind enmity against God."<sup>119</sup> Murray adds, "Man stands in contradiction to the holiness of God, and he stands thus in every aspect and in every relationship."<sup>120</sup> Together, these theologians show that Scripture teaches that all of human identity is affected by Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden. Human nature, body and soul, has been wholly defiled, wholly distorted.

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<sup>117</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 310.

<sup>118</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1:153.

<sup>119</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. two (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 80.

<sup>120</sup> Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2:80.

## **In Soul and Body**

Calvin observes that the human corrupted and depraved nature extends “to all parts of the soul...and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh.”<sup>121</sup> The curse given by the Lord in Genesis 3 does not land solely on the soul, or heart, of the human. In Genesis 3:19, the Lord declares to Adam and Eve, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Sin, and the curse that Adam’s posterity carries since, now brings death into the picture, a death that will one day be final but until then, peeks out in various ways throughout a human’s lifespan. And death reigns in a wholly defiled way, in soul and body, as Paul alludes to in Romans 5:12-21. As Allberry notes, “That our bodies die illustrates the fact that sin has reigned in them.”<sup>122</sup>

In Romans 3:10-18, Paul addresses this defiled state of soul and body. He concludes, “None is righteous,” and “Together they have become worthless.” He continues, “They use their tongues to deceive,” and “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness,” and “Their feet are swift to shed blood.” These are glimpses of the death that reigns in humans, expressed through the body, post Fall. These are characteristic of all humans, who have become wholly defiled in all parts and faculties of soul and body. Referencing the passage from Romans 3, Calvin maintains, “Paul himself leaves no room for doubt, when he says, that corruption does not dwell in one part only, but that no part

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<sup>121</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 152.

<sup>122</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 105.

is free from its deadly taint.”<sup>123</sup> Humans are embodied creatures, and sin has affected who they are, soul and body.

One last Scripture passage to note from Paul is Romans 7:21-23. In that passage, Paul writes, “I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.” Evil lies close at hand because people are wholly defiled in all parts and faculties. Of particular interest here is Paul’s use of the word “members.” He uses the same word in Romans 6:13, where he encourages the Roman Christians, “Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.” Murray contends, “If ‘mortal body’ means the physical organism, then the ‘members’ referred to in this verse must mean the members of the body, such as eye, hand, and foot.”<sup>124</sup> Allberry agrees with Murray, in that “*Members* here simply means the parts of our bodies. It is as though there was no aspect of our body that our sinful nature couldn’t find some use for.”<sup>125</sup> This leads to the disordered desire of sexual immorality, originating in the heart, and carried out in cooperation with the body.

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<sup>123</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 153.

<sup>124</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle To The Romans: The English Text With Introduction, Exposition And Notes*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 227.

<sup>125</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 105.

## *The Distortion of Sexual Immorality*

Having reviewed Scripture and works written about how humans fell into sin and became wholly defiled in all parts and faculties of soul and body, this portion of the literature review now focuses on the disordered desire of sexual immorality. As noted, God made humans as sexual beings, with sex to be experienced within the bounds of a covenant marriage relationship between man and woman. Soon after Adam and Eve's sin, however, what was created good became distorted. Humans begin murdering and oppressing one another (Genesis 4). Human sexuality went awry.

In the middle of the Lord giving the Ten Commandments to Israel, Exodus 20:14 states, "You shall not commit adultery." Leviticus 18:6 instructs, "None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness." Later in the same chapter, verse 20 warns, "You shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her." Verse 22 teaches, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination," and verse 23 adds, "You shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it...it is a perversion." Another example of sexual immorality is found in 2 Samuel 13, where Amnon rapes his sister Tamar. The account of the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19:22-25 closely resembles prostitution. Additionally, the dance that Herodias' daughter does for Herod and the party assembled in Matthew 14:1-12 reads like ancient pornography (erotic behavior being depicted for the viewing of others). New Testament scholar R.T. France suggests that when compared to the same account in the Gospel of Mark, "The telling in Matthew is comparatively restrained, leaving the reader to imagine the debauched atmosphere of an oriental

princeling's party."<sup>126</sup> These examples of incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, rape, prostitution, and ancient pornography are all biblical stories of human sexual desire being wholly defiled and affecting all parts of human identity.

## **Porneia**

Pastor Sam Storms observes, "The Greek word that is most often translated as 'sexual immorality' is *porneia*, the word from which we derive our English term, pornography."<sup>127</sup> In 1 Corinthians 6:18, Paul pleads with the Corinthian believers, "Flee from sexual immorality (*porneia*)." In his second letter to the same church, Paul laments, "I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality (*porneia*), and sensuality that they have practiced." (2 Corinthians 12:21) In Paul's great list of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19, *porneia* heads the list. But *porneia* isn't simply one type of distorted sexual desire. Storms' insight reads, "Whereas adultery and homosexuality are forms of *porneia* or sexual immorality, *porneia* is a much broader term that includes any and all sexual activity before or outside the marriage relationship."<sup>128</sup> He adds, "*Porneia* refers to any form of sexual activity before or outside the relationship of monogamous marriage between a man and a woman. It can refer to pre-marital sex, adultery, homosexual practice, prostitution, bestiality, and all other expressions of sexual activity outside the marital

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<sup>126</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 555.

<sup>127</sup> Sam Storms, "The Problem of 'Porneia,'" Sam Storms: Enjoying God, last modified May 10, 2018, <https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/the-problem-of--porneia->.

<sup>128</sup> Storms, "The Problem of 'Porneia.'"

relationship between a husband and wife.”<sup>129</sup> *Porneia* includes all the ways that human sexuality has been distorted and used outside of a covenant between a husband and wife.

### **With Our Bodies**

Paul pleads with the Corinthian believers to “flee sexual immorality” in 1 Corinthians 6:18. Right after that sentence, Paul instructs them, “Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.” Commenting on this passage, Allberry suggests, “There is a sense in which sexual sin is unlike any other sin. It is a sin ‘against’ our ‘own body.’”<sup>130</sup>

In his first letter to the Corinthian believers, Paul addresses misconceptions they had made in living out their faith. In chapter 6, Paul turns toward an error that had led to sexual immorality. The error has to do with their view of the body. Allberry writes, “Evidently, many in Corinth had bought into the mindset that what is done with the body is not spiritually significant.”<sup>131</sup> This assumption harkens back to the Platonic and Gnostic influences in the early church. This mindset was leading many believers in Corinth into sexual immorality, hence Paul’s need to address it. Pastor Kimberly Miller van Driel notes that for the Corinthians, “The body, being of less importance than the spirit, is of passing consequence; its functions are peripheral. Thus the body has the freedom to enjoy whatever is put in front of it, whether food or sex.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Storms, “The Problem of ‘Porneia.’”

<sup>130</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 52.

<sup>131</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 52.

<sup>132</sup> Kimberly Miller van Driel, “Power, Privilege, and Porneia in I Corinthians 6,” *Lutheran Forum* 52, Fall 2018: 28.

Paul corrects the Corinthians misunderstanding by pointing out, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” A few verses later, Paul exhorts them, “Glorify God in your body.” Allberry expresses, “Paul uses ‘your body’ and ‘you’ interchangeably in this part of the letter.”<sup>133</sup> Paul teaches the Corinthians, and all believers who follow, that “if we are our bodies, then what we do with them really does mean something. What our body does, *we* are doing.”<sup>134</sup> The Lord cares about what humans do with the physical, material aspect of who they are.

## **Pornography**

As the purpose of this study is to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the fight against the temptation to use pornography, this portion of the literature review section turns to address pornography as a specific manifestation of sexual immorality and its temptation.

While it has already been noted that sexual immorality is a broad category for human distorted sexual desires post-Fall, pornography use is a more recent and prevalent manifestation of sexual immorality. Struthers asserts, “There is little doubt that the availability of pornography has dramatically increased over the past twenty-five years. With the advent of home video machines in the 1980s and the internet in the 1990s, our culture has become saturated with sexually explicit and suggestive material.”<sup>135</sup> Print and digital media advancements allow easier access. Freeman observes, “For men, youth, and

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<sup>133</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 53.

<sup>134</sup> Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, 52.

<sup>135</sup> William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 20.



even women who struggle with pornography and lust, that laptop, tablet, or cell phone is like carrying around an adult bookstore all day long.”<sup>136</sup>

While conclusive numbers are elusive, some surveys indicate that “46% of American men between the ages of 18 and 39 use or view pornography in a given week, 56% in a month, and 69% in a year.”<sup>137</sup> Those statistics suggest that half, or more than half, the men in any given church use and view pornography on a consistent basis. Chester describes the current state as “an epidemic of pornography.”<sup>138</sup> Commenting on various surveys, Freeman states, “I believe you could easily add an increase of at least ten to fifteen percent to any of these statistics.”<sup>139</sup> Chester, observing that Christian numbers reporting pornography usage may be low, suggests, “Christians are likely to understate their problem, to view it as a past problem or a temporary issue. The shame factor suggests that the figures may be understated.”<sup>140</sup>

### **Relational Effects of Pornography Usage**

Pornography usage damages relationships. Doriani argues that pornography “incites adulterous thoughts. It is unfair to spouses, present or future, who cannot compete with models who polish their bodies for a living while photographers delete all defects.”<sup>141</sup> Author and researcher Pamela Paul published data on Americans and

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<sup>136</sup> Freeman, *Hide Or Seek*, 3.

<sup>137</sup> Regnerus, Gordon, and Price, “Documenting Pornography Use in America,” 880.

<sup>138</sup> Chester, *Closing the Window*, 7.

<sup>139</sup> Freeman, *Hide Or Seek*, 9.

<sup>140</sup> Chester, *Closing the Window*, 9.

<sup>141</sup> Doriani, *The New Man*, 85.

pornography for the first time in 2005.<sup>142</sup> She reports, “Fewer than one-fourth of women see no harm to relationships resulting from porn, according to the *Pornified*/Harris poll.”<sup>143</sup> The statistic indicates that most women believe that pornography use negatively impacts a relationship. Addiction counselor Patrick Carnes concurs that for those sex addicts who are married, “the marriage is often characterized by diminishing intimacy, sensitivity, and sexuality.”<sup>144</sup> A nationally representative and longitudinal study conducted in 2016 by the University of Oklahoma found that the likelihood of divorce doubles in men and women when pornography use is introduced after they marry.<sup>145</sup>

### *Summary of a Biblical Framework for Distorted Desires*

The Lord created Adam and Eve as physical beings with an immaterial soul and breathed into the physical creation he had made. After adding his embodied creatures to what he had already created, the Lord declared that all of what he created was “very good.” Part of that “very good” creation was the sexual relationship between the man and the woman. The goodness of sex was to be carried down within a covenant union of man and woman for all of time moving forward. However, because of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, sin entered the human experience and corrupted it along with all of creation. With this sin and corrupt nature came distorted and disordered desires. Humans,

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<sup>142</sup> Pamela Paul, *Pornified: How Pornography Is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families*, (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2005), 11.

<sup>143</sup> Paul, *Pornified*, 141.

<sup>144</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, 3rd ed. (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2001), 4.

<sup>145</sup> Samuel L. Perry and Cyrus Schleifer, “Till Porn Do Us Part? A Longitudinal Examination of Pornography Use and Divorce,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 55, (March 1, 2018): 292.

from then to the present, take God's good gifts and use them in ways that are disobedient and not intended by God's design, including sex.

Sexual immorality runs throughout the pages of Scripture, as well as the pages of history. Humans take the good gift of sex between a husband and wife and distort it to use it for gratification in sinful and selfish ways. *Porneia* is the Greek word for sexual immorality, a broad category including all things sexual outside of the bounds of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Viewing pornography is a present-day wading into *porneia*. With the introduction of laptops, smartphones and tablets, access to online pornography is as easy as pulling it out of one's bag or pocket.

### **The Psychology and Science of the Fight**

As the purpose of this study is to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography, it is important to understand the literature that Christian men might use to fight sin and temptation. As such, the last major section of the literature review focuses on how Christian theologians and authors have instructed other Christians in fighting sin and temptation toward sin. As this section progresses, emphasis will be given to literature on how to fight the temptation to view and use pornography, specifically literature within the last ten to twenty years, that which is easiest for most Christian men to find when wrestling with the temptation to view pornography.

#### *Early Church Fathers*

Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John, instructs the Philippian church, "Younger men must be blameless in all things, caring for purity before everything and

curbing themselves from every evil. For it is a good thing to refrain from lusts in the world, for every lust warreth against the Spirit.”<sup>146</sup> He exhorts young Christian men to be “diligent, walking according to the truth of the Lord,”<sup>147</sup> and to “turn unto the word...being sober unto prayer and constant in fastings.”<sup>148</sup>

Clement, an early bishop of Rome, while writing to the church in Corinth, exhorts the Christians there to fight sin by “think(ing) such things as be sober and grave...perform all things in a blameless and honourable and pure conscience...keeping in the rule of obedience, being temperate in all things.”<sup>149</sup> Clement adds that he desires that the Corinthian Christians be “attending diligently to his (God’s) words”<sup>150</sup> and that they “leave empty and vain thoughts...consider what is good and pleasing and acceptable before him who made us...look steadfastly to the blood of Christ.”<sup>151</sup>

The early church father and author Tertullian stresses the importance of repentance from sin. Encouraging Christians toward repentance, he contends that repentance was given by God for salvation. He writes, “Where there is no fear, in like manner there is no amendment; where there is no amendment, repentance is of necessity

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<sup>146</sup> Polycarp, “The Epistle of Polycarp,” trans. J.B. Lightfoot, Early Christian Writings, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/polycarp-lightfoot.html>.

<sup>147</sup> “The Epistle of Polycarp.”

<sup>148</sup> “The Epistle of Polycarp.”

<sup>149</sup> Clement, “The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians,” trans. Charles H. Hoole, Early Christian Writings, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-hoole.html>.

<sup>150</sup> “The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians.”

<sup>151</sup> “The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians.”

vain, for it lacks the fruit for which God sowed it; that is, man's salvation."<sup>152</sup> He continues by exhorting Christians, "having found 'the truth,' repent of errors; repent of having loved what God loves not."<sup>153</sup> Tertullian warns Christians, "Repentance which...once learned and undertaken by us ought never afterward to be cancelled by repetition in sin."<sup>154</sup> He teaches that repentance for the Christian is a key element in faith, and walking in repeated sin shows that a Christian is not truly repentant.

Early church father and theologian Augustine stressed that humans must see themselves as weak, in the flesh and in the mind, for the grace of Christ to have its proper effect upon them. In reflecting on 2 Corinthians 12:9, Augustine argues, "This grace, however, by which strength is perfected in weakness, conducts all who are predestined and called according to the divine purpose to the state of the highest perfection and glory. By such grace it is effected, not only that we discover what ought to be done, but also that we do what we have discovered."<sup>155</sup> Augustine argues that humans must see themselves as weak, and in need of God's grace, for that grace to show them how to live. Additionally, the effect of God's grace is not simply to show humans how to live but to do what has been shown.

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<sup>152</sup> Tertullian, "On Repentance," trans. Sydney Thelwall, *Early Christian Writings*, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian20.html>.

<sup>153</sup> "On Repentance."

<sup>154</sup> "On Repentance."

<sup>155</sup> Augustine, *On Grace and Original Sin* (United States of America: Beloved Publishing, 2014), 12–13.

## *Reformation Writers*

As the early church fathers thought and wrote about how Christians are to fight sin and temptation, so too did the thinkers and writers in the Reformation era. Like Tertullian centuries before him, the great reformer Martin Luther stresses the importance of repentance in the life of the Christian fighting sin. Referencing Jesus' words in Mark 1:15, Luther emphasizes that Christians must "repent and believe the Gospel, i.e., become different and do otherwise, and believe My promise."<sup>156</sup> When Luther states that the believer must "become different and do otherwise," he is highlighting that the Christian must believe that apart from Christ he is a rebel against God. He adds, "This, then, is what it means to begin true repentance; and here man must hear such a sentence as this: You are all of no account, whether you be manifest sinners or saints (in your own opinion); you all must become different and do otherwise than you now are and are doing."<sup>157</sup>

In addition to repentance, Luther argues that confession is a vital part of the Christian's battle against sin. He maintains, "Absolution (confession)...is also an aid and consolation against sin."<sup>158</sup> Luther goes further: "As long as we are in the flesh, we shall not lie when we say, 'I am a poor man (I acknowledge that I am a miserable sinner), full of sin.'"<sup>159</sup> Commenting on Luther's own life of confession, pastor R.C. Sproul reports, "Luther was not satisfied with a brief recitation of his sins. He wanted to make sure that

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<sup>156</sup> Martin Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, trans. F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau (Troutdale, OR, 2024), 12.

<sup>157</sup> Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, 12.

<sup>158</sup> Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, 18.

<sup>159</sup> Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, 18.

no sin in his life was left unconfessed. He entered the confessional and stayed for hours every day.”<sup>160</sup> Such was Luther’s understanding of the importance of confession.

Like Tertullian and Luther, Calvin points out the significance of repentance in fighting against sin and temptation. He defines repentance as “a real conversion of our life unto God, proceeding from sincere and serious fear of God; and consisting in the mortification of our flesh and the old man, and the quickening of the Spirit.”<sup>161</sup> The mortification of the flesh and the quickening of the Spirit are old phrases with much meaning. Calvin offers, “Seeing that all the desires of the flesh are enmity against God (Rom 8:7), the first step to the obedience of his law is the renouncement of our own nature.”<sup>162</sup> Repentance begins as followers of God acknowledge and turn from their sin nature and its disordered desires. Calvin argues that in addition to renouncing that nature, Christians must add self-denial, as is instructed in Scripture. He writes, “As we are naturally averse to God, unless self-denial precede, we shall never tend to that which is right. Hence we are so often enjoined to put off the old man, to renounce the world and the flesh, to forsake our lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of our mind.”<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1985), 129.

<sup>161</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 388.

<sup>162</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 390.

<sup>163</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 390.

## *Puritan Thoughts*

Puritan church leader John Owen wrote on the Christian duty to mortify sin. He defines mortification as “putting sin to death.”<sup>164</sup> He adds, “To kill a man, or any other living thing, is to take away the principle of all his strength, vigor, and power, so that he cannot act or exert or put forth any proper actings of his own.”<sup>165</sup> Owen applies mortification to sin in all Christians, even after they believe. “The mortification of indwelling sin remaining in our mortal bodies, that it may not have life and power to bring forth the word or deeds of the flesh, is the constant duty of believers.”<sup>166</sup> Owen instructs, “Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of your sin;”<sup>167</sup> “Raise up your heart by faith to an expectation of relief from Christ;”<sup>168</sup> “Consider his mercifulness, tenderness, and kindness, as he is our great High Priest at the right hand of God;”<sup>169</sup> and “Act faith peculiarly upon the death, blood, and cross of Christ; that is, on Christ as crucified and slain.”<sup>170</sup>

Considering sin and how to fight it, Edwards suggests that Christians do their best to avoid temptation. “For persons needlessly to expose themselves to temptation, and to do those things that tend to sin, is unwarrantable, and contrary that excellent example set

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<sup>164</sup> John Owen, Kelly M. Kapic, and Justin Taylor, *Overcoming Sin & Temptation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 48.

<sup>165</sup> Owen, Kapic, and Taylor, *Overcoming Sin & Temptation*, 48.

<sup>166</sup> Owen, Kapic, and Taylor, *Overcoming Sin & Temptation*, 49.

<sup>167</sup> Owen, Kapic, and Taylor, *Overcoming Sin & Temptation*, 131.

<sup>168</sup> Owen, Kapic, and Taylor, *Overcoming Sin & Temptation*, 133.

<sup>169</sup> Owen, Kapic, and Taylor, *Overcoming Sin & Temptation*, 134.

<sup>170</sup> Owen, Kapic, and Taylor, *Overcoming Sin & Temptation*, 136.



before us.”<sup>171</sup> He doubles down, stating, “It is very evident that we ought to use our utmost endeavors to avoid sin.”<sup>172</sup> In another sermon, Edwards remarks that a primary aspect of fighting sin in the Christian’s life is “embracing Christ and trusting in him as the Saviour from sin. We must look to him not only as a Saviour from the punishment of sin, but we must receive and embrace him as a Saviour from sin itself.”<sup>173</sup> Like many before and after him, Edwards emphasizes the importance of the work of Jesus at the cross and a Christian’s relationship with him as the means of fighting sin.

### *Modern Fighting*

Modern Christian thought on the temptation of viewing pornography draws from many modern sources. Because of the prevalence of pornography and the damage it causes to people and relationships, much has been written from a psychological and neurological standpoint on the viewing and using of pornography.

### **Psychology**

Modern psychology addresses pornography temptation and sexual addiction from many angles. While overlapping at times, counselors from a biblical counseling standpoint address fighting sexual sin in the heart. As mentioned earlier in this study,

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<sup>171</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 2:227.

<sup>172</sup> Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:227.

<sup>173</sup> Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:841.

“All of the ways in which the Bible refers to the inner person (mind, emotions, spirit, soul, will, etc.) are summed up with this one term: *heart*.”<sup>174</sup>

Lane and Tripp offer that God’s grace is “at work to change our hearts through the power of the Spirit. The Word and Spirit work together, enabling us to see Christ in all his power and mercy. This leads to heart change at the level of what we worship and cherish at any given moment.”<sup>175</sup> Their focus on Christ’s work in helping humans fight sin is comparable to the historic teachings reviewed earlier. Lane and Tripp argue that such change happens at the heart level, for any sinful pattern. Lane and Tripp continue, “This kind of radical heart change reorients me vertically—person to God—and I repent of what I have cherished in place of Christ. This vertical change then leads to new behavior on the horizontal, person-to-person, plane.”<sup>176</sup> Heart change, done vertically with the Lord, changes a Christian’s outward behavior.

Like Lane and Tripp, Welch maintains that battling internal temptations is largely done from within, against the power of sin, by taking the soul to task.<sup>177</sup> In the diagram below, Welch describes the process of change. The focus of Welch’s diagram is mostly internal: a model of how to take the soul to task.

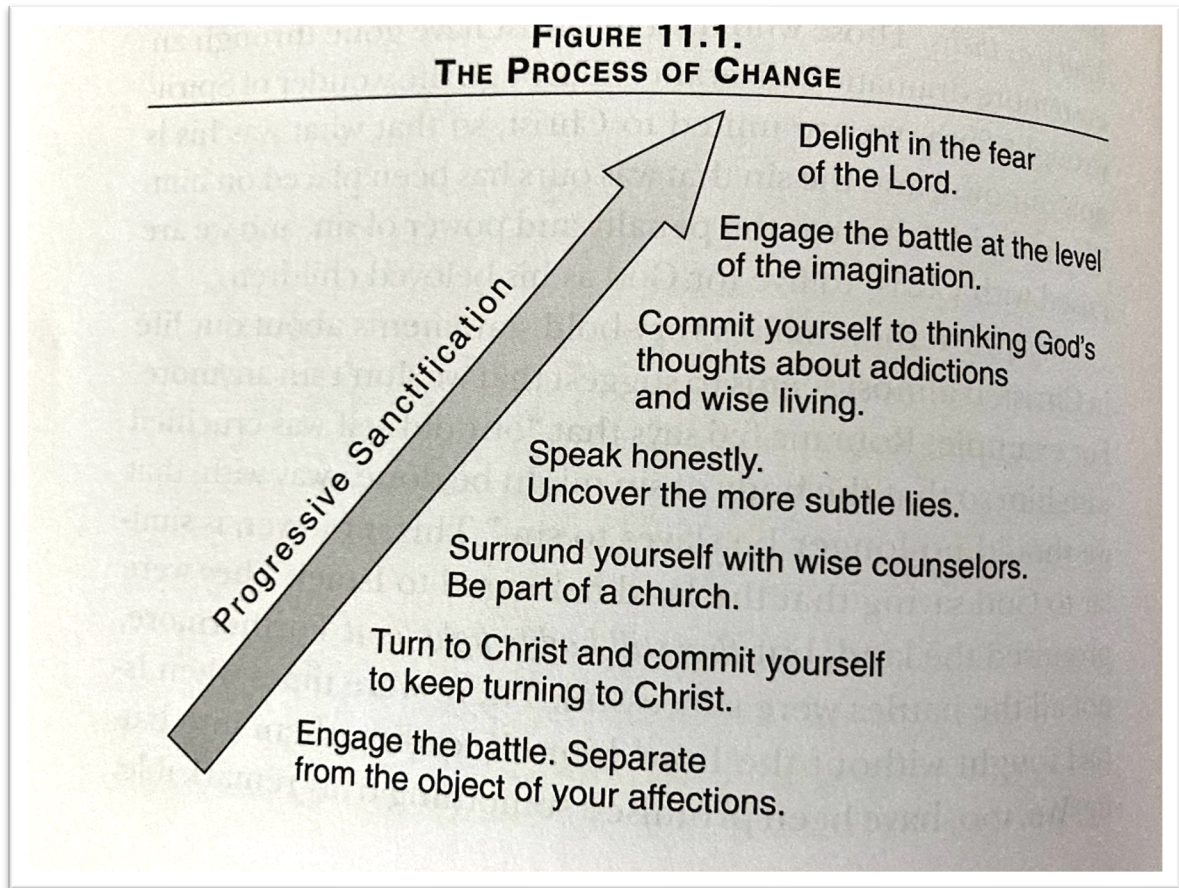
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<sup>174</sup> Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 14.

<sup>175</sup> Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 21.

<sup>176</sup> Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 21.

<sup>177</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave: Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 230.



**Figure 2:** A diagram from Ed Welch’s book, *Addictions*.<sup>178</sup>

Reju and Holmes offer various strategies for battling temptation and addiction to pornography. One strategy they offer is limiting internet access. “A common strategy for fighting porn addiction is to restrict struggler’s access. We take away their freedom in order to protect them from themselves.”<sup>179</sup> Another strategy offered is to limit anonymity, because “one of the antidotes to sexual sin is to yank it into the light.”<sup>180</sup> They also argue that disordered cravings, or appetites, must be replaced with ordered ones. “Our chief

<sup>178</sup> Welch, *Addictions*, 232.

<sup>179</sup> Reju and Holmes, *Rescue Plan*, 48.

<sup>180</sup> Reju and Holmes, *Rescue Plan*, 53.

strategy as disciplers is to grow holy appetites in a sinner. *Holy appetites expel unholy desires.*”<sup>181</sup> Additionally, Reju and Holmes mention that Christians must be aware of places of unbelief. “Every believer wrestles with *momentary atheism*—she has occasions when she gives herself over to her unbelief...The struggler’s momentary atheism leads to dangerous spiritual consequences.”<sup>182</sup>

Similar to what is argued by Lane, Tripp, Welch, Reju and Holmes, Powlison suggests, “Going in the right direction in your struggle with sexual addiction means learning to fight your temptation to *sin*, learning to handle your *guilt* when you fail, and learning to understand and deal with the *circumstances* in which you are tempted.”<sup>183</sup> Powlison advises some practical strategies for change pertaining to pornography. In addition to suggesting that strugglers talk to God<sup>184</sup> and listen to God in Scripture,<sup>185</sup> Powlison suggests engaging with a new vision or imagination. “Because sexual addiction is a sin that starts with your imagination, true change has to reach your thought life. You can’t ‘just say no’ to an evil imagination. You have to appeal in a more profound way to your imagination by working to replace the evil, dark, and wicked in your mind with the good, light, and pure.”<sup>186</sup> This shift echoes Welch’s diagram, which calls Christians to “engage the battle at the level of the imagination.”<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Reju and Holmes, *Rescue Plan*, 55.

<sup>182</sup> Reju and Holmes, *Rescue Plan*, 56.

<sup>183</sup> Powlison, *Sexual Addiction*, 8.

<sup>184</sup> Powlison, *Sexual Addiction*, 18.

<sup>185</sup> Powlison, *Sexual Addiction*, 20.

<sup>186</sup> Powlison, *Sexual Addiction*, 22.

<sup>187</sup> Welch, *Addictions*, 232.

Others in the field of psychology, like psychologist Mark Laaser, maintain that there are five components to the treatment of sexual addiction. “These include stopping sexual behaviors, stopping rituals, stopping fantasy, healing despair, and healing shame.”<sup>188</sup> As he describes how to stop the sexual behaviors, Laaser offers putting together an abstinence contract,<sup>189</sup> getting counseling,<sup>190</sup> seeking medical help,<sup>191</sup> and going to outpatient or inpatient treatment programs.<sup>192</sup> Carnes notes, “A working definition of abstinence needs to be in place while the addict initiates the recovery process.”<sup>193</sup> Like Laaser, Carnes believes that stopping the behavior is important in battling the use of pornography.

Laaser and Carnes agree that understanding ritualization is an important part of battling sexual addiction, including pornography use. Laaser advises, “Rituals are all the thoughts and actions that lead to sexual acting out.”<sup>194</sup> Comparatively, Carnes defines rituals as, “regularly followed methods of preparing for sexual activity to take place.”<sup>195</sup> Laaser observes, “Positive discipline establishes new, positive rituals for the sex

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<sup>188</sup> Mark R. Laaser, Gary Smalley, and Patrick Carnes, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 148.

<sup>189</sup> Laaser, Smalley, and Carnes, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, 150.

<sup>190</sup> Laaser, Smalley, and Carnes, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, 151.

<sup>191</sup> Laaser, Smalley, and Carnes, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, 152.

<sup>192</sup> Laaser, Smalley, and Carnes, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, 152.

<sup>193</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Contrary to Love: Helping the Sexual Addict* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1994), 252.

<sup>194</sup> Laaser, Smalley, and Carnes, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, 153.

<sup>195</sup> Carnes, *Contrary to Love*, 62.

addict.”<sup>196</sup> Complementary to Laaser, Carnes emphasizes, “The therapist needs to remember his or her own limited role: to *create life-enhancing rituals* to replace destructive addictive rituals.”<sup>197</sup> One life-enhancing ritual that Laaser mentions is physical discipline. “Anything done to nourish oneself in positive physical ways is also having a healthy physical relationship with oneself.”<sup>198</sup>

## Neuroscience

The field of neuroscience studies the damage done to the brain by ongoing pornography use and provides wisdom for fighting the temptation. Struthers notes, “When we understand how the brain is flexible and plastic, and also how it is unyielding and rigid, we can see not only how pornography can lead a person to a place of mental depravity, but also how hope for redemption and sanctification can be achieved.”<sup>199</sup> Struthers argues that viewing pornography changes the brain for the worse, but he also argues that because the brain has a plasticity to it, it can be changed for the positive. A definition of brain plasticity may be helpful. Authors Pierre Maquet, Carlyle Smith, and Robert Strickgold define brain plasticity as, “the ability of the brain to persistently change its structure and function according to the genetic information, in response to environmental changes or to comply with the interaction between these two factors.”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Laaser, Smalley, and Carnes, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, 155.

<sup>197</sup> Carnes, *Contrary to Love*, 247.

<sup>198</sup> Laaser, Smalley, and Carnes, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, 156.

<sup>199</sup> Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy*, 87.

<sup>200</sup> Pierre Maquet, Carlyle Smith, and Robert Strickgold, eds., *Sleep and Brain Plasticity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

Pornography use changes the structure of the brain in response to the *environment* of viewing pornographic material. Another word used in neuroscience for brain plasticity is neuroplasticity. Psychiatrist Norman Doidge teaches, “*Neuro* is for ‘neuron,’ the nerve cells in our brains and nervous system. *Plastic* is for ‘changeable, malleable, modifiable.”<sup>201</sup> But how does pornography change, or modify, the brain?

Struthers explains the process. “Because of the way that the male brain is wired, it is prone to pick up on sexually relevant cues. These cues trigger arousal and a series of neurological, hormonal, and neurochemical events are set into motion. Memories about how to respond to these cues are set off, and the psychological, emotional, and behavioral response begins. As the pattern of arousal and response continues, it deepens the neurological pathway, making a trough.”<sup>202</sup> Every time a man views pornography, it becomes a sexually relevant cue he acts upon emotionally and behaviorally. The more often he views pornography, the more engrained the “trough” becomes in the brain. “This neural system trough, along with neurotransmitters and hormones, are the underlying physical realities of a man’s sexual experience. Each time that an unhealthy sexual pattern is repeated, a neurological, emotional, and spiritual erosion carves out a channel that will eventually develop into a canyon from which there is no escape.”<sup>203</sup> The ongoing use of pornography neurologically moves those using it toward addiction.

Lembke broadly defines addiction as “the continued and compulsive consumption of a substance or behavior (gambling, gaming, sex) despite its harm to self and/or

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<sup>201</sup> Norman Doidge, *The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science* (United States of America: Penguin Random House, 2007), xix.

<sup>202</sup> Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy*, 106.

<sup>203</sup> Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy*, 106.

others.”<sup>204</sup> She argues that dopamine is a neurotransmitter closely connected to addiction.<sup>205</sup> “Dopamine is used to measure the addictive potential of any behavior or drug. The more dopamine a drug releases in the brain’s reward pathway...and the faster it releases dopamine, the more addictive the drug.”<sup>206</sup> Struthers adds, “Sexual cues trigger the release of dopamine.”<sup>207</sup> These findings suggest that viewing pornography is the sexual cue that triggers the release of dopamine, reinforcing the habit of viewing pornography, turning it into an addictive behavior creating more addictive neurological pathways. But Struthers suggests that there is hope, and the medical literature concurs.

Neurologist David Perlmutter believes that diet can benefit brain plasticity. He suggests that caloric restriction “confers profound neuroprotection, increases the growth of new brain cells, and allows existing neural networks to expand their sphere of influence (i.e., neuroplasticity).”<sup>208</sup> Perlmutter defines caloric restriction as “a reduced-calorie diet (typically reduced by around 30 percent).”<sup>209</sup> Lembke reveals that caloric restriction fits into the scientific field known as *hormesis*. Hormesis “studies the beneficial effects of administering small to moderate doses of noxious and/or painful

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<sup>204</sup> Anna Lembke, *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2021), 16.

<sup>205</sup> Lembke, *Dopamine Nation*, 48.

<sup>206</sup> Lembke, *Dopamine Nation*, 49.

<sup>207</sup> Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy*, 101.

<sup>208</sup> David Perlmutter and Kristin Loberg, *Grain Brain: The Surprising Truth About Wheat, Carbs, and Sugar—Your Brain’s Silent Killers* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013), 135.

<sup>209</sup> Perlmutter and Loberg, *Grain Brain*, 133.



stimuli, such as cold, heat, gravitational changes, radiation, food restriction, and exercise.”<sup>210</sup>

In addition to diet, the literature illustrates that exercise is beneficial to brain plasticity. Lembke observes, “Exercise increases many of the neurotransmitters involved in positive mood regulation: dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine, epinephrine, endocannabinoids, and endogenous opioid peptides (endorphins).”<sup>211</sup> She suggests that because exercise increases these neurotransmitters, it “contributes to the birth of new neurons and supporting glial cells.”<sup>212</sup> Comparatively, Perlmutter points out, “Exercise has been proven to induce growth of new neurons in the brain.”<sup>213</sup> These are arguments that exercise positively affects brain plasticity.

In addition to diet and exercise, science and medicine are revealing the role of healthy sleep on the brain and its ability to heal and grow. Perlmutter contends, “We understand the value of sleep from a scientific perspective as we never have before. Both laboratory and clinical studies have shown that virtually every system in the body is affected by the quality and amount of sleep we get, especially the brain.”<sup>214</sup> Doidge concurs, stating, “The dream state...facilitates plastic change.”<sup>215</sup> Recent science and technology have shown that the amount and quality of sleep effects brain plasticity. In

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<sup>210</sup> Lembke, *Dopamine Nation*, 148.

<sup>211</sup> Lembke, *Dopamine Nation*, 150.

<sup>212</sup> Lembke, *Dopamine Nation*, 150.

<sup>213</sup> Perlmutter and Loberg, *Grain Brain*, 200.

<sup>214</sup> Perlmutter and Loberg, *Grain Brain*, 207.

<sup>215</sup> Doidge, *The Brain That Changes Itself*, 239.

other words, sleep heals and restores the brain, even from the damage inflicted from ongoing behavioral patterns.

### *Summary of The Psychology and Science of the Fight*

Sin has been a part of human nature since Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord in the Garden of Eden. As such, the people of God throughout redemptive history have had to think and write about how to fight back against that sin nature. This section of the literature review started with literature from the early church fathers and ran up to the present. Early church fathers emphasize the need for believers to reject distorted lusts, remain obedient to the Lord, be quick to repent, and understand sin's weakness so that the grace of God may have its full effect.

Reformation writers, like Luther and Calvin, stress the importance of confession of sin, as well as the believer's need for repentance. Puritan authors advise that the Christian must, by looking to Jesus, mortify the sin that remains. Humans kill the power of sin through the power of Jesus. Additionally, Puritan theologians offer that Christians should avoid sin and temptation as much as is possible. Humans avoid sin by not being in tempting situations that lead to sinful actions.

Modern Christian psychology offers various thoughts on how to fight the temptation to view pornography. Authors from a biblical counseling stream suggest humans change most at the heart level. Seeing Christ's power and mercy, turning to him in moments of temptation, restricting access to pornography, avoiding sin, and getting a new imagination for change are some of the strategies offered. Others in the field of psychology contend that those tempted toward pornography use must stop the rituals that lead them down the road to viewing pornography. In addition, they suggest that seeking

medical help, getting counseling, and getting inpatient or outpatient treatment might help the struggler. Within the psychological literature reviewed on fighting sexual sin, one source found that physical discipline might help in working toward health.

The field of neuroscience was reviewed because of the findings within neuroscience in recent years. Because of recent technology, neuroscientists have a better understanding of the effects of ongoing pornography use on the brain. Relatedly, due to technological advancements, neuroscientists also have a better understanding of what positively affects the plasticity of the brain. Healthy diet, exercise, and sleep have been shown to heal the brain. This type of information is largely missing from Christian literature on how to fight the temptation to view pornography, even though pornography use is shown to change the brain in significant and damaging ways.

## **Summary of Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography. The literature review began by examining literature related to historical, philosophical thought on the body, as well as more recent literature on human embodiment. A historical understanding of how the body has been viewed helps shape the context for how the body is viewed today. Recent literature by Christian authors and thinkers, regarding human embodiment, indicates a recent re-capturing of a Scripture-based theology of the body's importance to what it means to be human.

The second section of the literature review laid out a biblical framework for distorted desires due to Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden. Scripture passages were examined to indicate the goodness of God's creation of man and woman, as well as

the goodness of the sexual relationship between them. Additionally, Scripture passages were reviewed that teach how human distorted sexual desires originated, and others were included to show that *porneia*, or sexual immorality, was warned against again and again throughout God's Word. Specific attention was given to the distorted desire of pornography viewing as a more recent example of sexual immorality. Additional authors and theologians were reviewed to give commentary on the instruction found in Scripture.

The last section of the literature review focused on literature related to how a Christian would go about fighting against the sin and temptation of pornography use. Literature was reviewed from early church fathers, Reformation thinkers, and Puritan pastors. Modern psychological literature from a Christian perspective was also reviewed, along with literature from the field of neuroscience. This section of the literature review gave a breadth to what type of literature the average Christian man might find regarding how to fight sin, as well as how to fight the particular temptation to view pornography.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography. The assumption of this study was that some Christian men have seen improved progress in the heart fight against pornography temptation, and that they would attribute some of that progress to the physical stewardship of their body. Therefore, a qualitative study was proposed to determine the ways in which Christian men doing heart work and physical stewardship of their body would relate physical stewardship to success in battling pornography use. To examine these areas more closely, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. In what ways do Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies as a means of faithfully caring for the body the Lord has gifted them?
2. In what ways do Christian men engage in heart work to fight against the temptation to use pornography?
3. How do Christian men relate the physical stewardship of their bodies to their success in fighting the temptation to use pornography?

### **Design of the Study**

As the purpose of this study was to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography, a study method was chosen that would reveal deep understandings of the experiences of Christian men. In her book, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and*

*Implementation*, distinguished author and expert in research methods, Sharan B.

Merriam, explains, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.”<sup>216</sup> Elsewhere in her book, Merriam notes, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”<sup>217</sup> As this study’s goal was to find out what meaning Christian men might attribute to physical stewardship of their bodies, a basic qualitative study was chosen as the research method to gain answers and information related to the research questions.

Four characteristics are key to understanding the nature of qualitative research.<sup>218</sup> Merriam lists them succinctly: “the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive.”<sup>219</sup> Regarding the inductive process, Merriam states, “Typically, findings inductively derived from data in a qualitative study are in the form of themes, categories, typologies, concepts, tentative hypotheses, and even theory about a particular aspect of practice.”<sup>220</sup> Thus, the inductive nature of a qualitative study best fulfilled the purpose of the study, to explore and gather themes and concepts related to human experiences.

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<sup>216</sup> Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 6.

<sup>217</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 15.

<sup>218</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 15.

<sup>219</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 15.

<sup>220</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 17.

## Participant Sample Selection

The research for this study required participants who were tempted toward the use of pornography and who intentionally fought this temptation in the heart, aided by the physical stewardship of their bodies. Purposeful sampling was used “to discover, understand, and gain insight”<sup>221</sup> from a sample from which “the most can be learned.”<sup>222</sup>

To gain data towards insights and best practices from those who fight the temptation toward pornography with a heart and embodied approach, the participants self-reported that they experienced temptation toward the use of pornography in their life, but over time they experienced significant progress in fighting this temptation. The participants also self-reported that they fought the temptation toward pornography use in the heart, taking their disordered sexual desires to the Lord, and asking him to change them. Additionally, participants self-reported that they care for their physical bodies and that they attribute, in some way, their progress in the heart fight against pornography temptation to the physical stewardship of their bodies.

The participants were limited to men who self-reported that they are Christians who engage with a local church body and have attended regularly for at least the last 5 years. Participants also self-reported that they pray and read the Bible regularly. The purpose for these criteria was to gain insights from men best able to communicate about temptation, stewardship, and heart work. The reason for the criterion for a participant to be male was twofold. First, the temptation to view pornography is more prevalent in men. In his book, *Wired for Intimacy*, psychologist and professor William Struthers, says, “It is

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<sup>221</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 96.

<sup>222</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 96.

true that women are increasingly becoming consumers of pornography, but there is little doubt that it is primarily men who are hooked on it.”<sup>223</sup> The second reason was for accountability and comfortability in the interview process, as the topic can be a sensitive one. The researcher interviewed men between the ages of 37 and 72. As the men interviewed have cared for their physical stewardship and had a faith for some significant time, this provided a breadth of wisdom and experience in order to “discover, understand, and gain insight”<sup>224</sup> from a sample “from which the most can be learned.”<sup>225</sup>

The research study was conducted through the interviews of six individuals who self-reported that they meet the criteria of the study participants. Each participant was invited to be interviewed through an introductory email, followed by an initial phone call, once the participant was willing to be a part of the study. After each participant agreed to be in the research study, a Participant Consent Form was sent to them to sign their consent, to respect and to protect the human rights of the participant. The researcher has met the requirements of the Seminary IRB, and the Human Rights Risk Level Assessment is “minimal” according to the Seminary IRB guidelines.

### **RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by Jason Jones to investigate the effects of physical stewardship of the body on pornography temptation, for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Covenant Theological Seminary. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can

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<sup>223</sup> Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy*, 11.

<sup>224</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 96.

<sup>225</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 96.



be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, and/or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

- 1) The purpose of the research is to investigate how Christian men's engagement in the physical stewardship of their body aids in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography.
- 2) Potential benefits of the research may include helping other Christians to fight the besetting and plaguing sin of pornography use. Though there are no direct benefits for participants, they may be encouraged by the experience of sharing their experiences with an eager listener and learner.
- 3) The research process will include the interviewing of six Christian men, whose interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed using an inductive and constant comparative method.
- 4) Participants in this research will be asked to be interviewed for 90 minutes, discussing the physical discipline of their bodies, their heart work related to pornography temptation, and how they relate the physical discipline of their body to success with the heart work they engage in.
- 5) Potential discomforts or stresses: In addition to the time given, talking about the temptation to use pornography can be discomfoting and stressful.
- 6) Potential risks: Minimal. Participants are asked to reveal personal information regarding individual viewpoints, background, experiences, behaviors, attitudes or beliefs.
- 7) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.
- 8) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.
- 9) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the study.

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Printed Name and Signature of Researcher

Date

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Printed Name and Signature of Participant

Date

*Please sign both copies. Keep one. Return the other to the researcher. Thank you.*

Research at Covenant Theological Seminary which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Director, Doctor of Ministry; Covenant Theological Seminary; 12330 Conway Road; St. Louis, MO 63141; Phone (314) 434-4044.

## Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering.

“Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them.”<sup>226</sup> The open-ended nature of interview questions facilitated the ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues to explore them more thoroughly. Ultimately, these methods enabled this study to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variety of participants. Additionally, the semi-structured interview with open-ended questions “allow(ed) the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.”<sup>227</sup>

The researcher performed a pilot test of the interview protocol to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories derived from the literature and evolved around the explanations and descriptions that emerged from doing constant comparison work during the interviewing process. Coding and categorizing the data while continuing the process of interviewing also allowed for the emergence of new sources of data. “Collection and analysis should be a *simultaneous* process in qualitative research.”<sup>228</sup>

The researcher interviewed six Christian men for 90 minutes each. Prior to the interview, the participants were scheduled for the interview via email, signed the Participant Consent Form, and were made aware of the purpose of the study. The

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<sup>226</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 108.

<sup>227</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 111.

<sup>228</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 195.

researcher did everything possible to accommodate participant schedules, to make the time commitment as easy as possible. The researcher audiotaped the interviews with a digital recorder. Directly after each interview, the researcher wrote field notes with descriptive and reflective observations on the interview time.

The interview protocol contained the following questions.

1. What practices do you engage in for physical discipline of your body?
2. What compels you to engage in the physical discipline of your body? What is your motivation?
3. What practices do you engage in to grow in heart obedience toward the Lord?
4. Do you believe there is a connection between heart work and physical stewardship/discipline? If so, would you please explain?
5. How have you experienced your fight against pornography temptation being affected by the physical discipline of your body?
6. When you are experiencing the most freedom from pornography temptation, what do you attribute that freedom to?
7. How has relationship with Jesus affected the various aspects of discipline in your life?
8. If you were to read or recommend a book, or resource, on fighting the temptation to view pornography, what might you choose?

## **Data Analysis**

As soon as possible and within one week, the researcher personally transcribed each interview by using computer software to play back the digital recording on a computer and typing out each transcript. The software allowed for efficiency and

accuracy. When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files, they were coded and analyzed using a constant comparative method. The constant comparative method “involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data.”<sup>229</sup>

The ongoing data analysis focused on discovering and identifying common themes, patterns and insights, as well as congruence, across the variation of participants. Additionally, the analysis focused on uncovering any discrepancies between the different experiences and interpretations of the participants. As the analysis method being used was constant comparative and as “data analysis is best done in conjunction with data collection,”<sup>230</sup> some discoveries of insights and discrepancies created additional follow-up questions in some of the later interviews.

### **Researcher Position**

In *Qualitative Research*, Merriam says, “The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.”<sup>231</sup> Thus, “data have been filtered through his or her particular theoretical position and biases”<sup>232</sup> and are here noted.

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<sup>229</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 32.

<sup>230</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 204.

<sup>231</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 16.

<sup>232</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 264.

The researcher is 46 years old and has been a Christian for 30 years at this writing. The researcher holds to an orthodox view of sin and grace. His time in the Christian church has been filled with teaching about the truths of the gospel and about how “the heart is the ‘real’ you.”<sup>233</sup> The researcher does not recall hearing teaching in the church about the significance of embodied nature prior to January 2024. As such, he has long held a practical belief that most sin, including pornography, is primarily, if not entirely, fought in the heart, with little else to consider and aid in the fight.

The researcher is the counseling pastor in a church of about 800 people. He regularly meets with Christian men fighting the temptation to use pornography as a means of escaping and coping with the stresses and hardships of life. The researcher watches these men wrestling with the besetting sin of pornography use and wants something more to help these men. Additionally, the researcher is a sinful man himself. He struggles with lust and temptations like all humans do. The researcher lives in a world where pornography “is everywhere. You cannot get away from it,”<sup>234</sup> so he hopes and expects to find results that would make his and others’ lives more joyful and free of temptation struggles.

### **Study Limitations**

This research study has several limitations in the methodology, particularly. Due to the sensitive nature of pornography and sexual behavior, this study is limited to Christian men. The researcher is a man, and many of the people he sees for counseling

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<sup>233</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 59.

<sup>234</sup> Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy*, 13.

purposes related to pornography temptation are men. Further research is needed to broaden the participant selection to include how Christian women might relate the physical stewardship of their bodies to the heart fight against pornography use. Would there be comparable themes and patterns in the data? Similarly, would there be any discrepancies between what women might share and what men shared? Would there be new themes and patterns that didn't show up in the interviews with men? Readers are cautioned not to generalize the particular aspects of these conclusions onto Christian women. Those aspects should be tested in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, "the person who reads the study decides whether the findings can apply to his or her particular situation."<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 256.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography. Six men were interviewed for the purpose of this study. Three interviews were conducted in person, and three interviews were conducted over video calls as the researcher and the interviewee do not live in the same town. This chapter provides the findings of the six interviews and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. In what ways do Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies as a means of faithfully caring for the body the Lord has gifted them?
2. In what ways do Christian men engage in heart work to fight against the temptation to use pornography?
3. How do Christian men relate the physical stewardship of their bodies to their success in fighting the temptation to use pornography?

### **Introduction to Participants**

The researcher selected six men to participate in this study. All names and identifiable participant information have been changed to protect identity. The researcher used purposeful sampling to select participants with insight into the Research Questions, and given the nature and vulnerability of the subject matter (pornography and sexual sin), the researcher attempted a combination of convenience sampling and maximum variation

sampling.<sup>236</sup> As sexual sin and pornography temptation are vulnerable topics, the researcher had some men opt of interviews and had a limited pool of respondents. Within that pool, the researcher pursued maximum variation, hence, the age range is almost 40 years.

#### Participant #1 – Sam

Sam is a 72-year-old man, married, with grown children. He serves as a university professor, teaching a wide range of courses from Bible to practical ministry. Alongside his years as a professor, Sam has served in various pastoral capacities in church.

#### Participant #2 – Steve

Steve is a 54-year-old man, married, with children in their college years. He works in vocational ministry as the lead pastor of the church that he serves.

#### Participant #3 – Robert

Robert is a 51-year-old married man. He lives in rural America, splitting his time between corporate work and farming/ranching on his homestead.

#### Participant #4 – Nathan

Nathan is a 37-year-old man, married, with young children. He has a degree in counseling and serves in a para-church ministry specializing in discipleship and athletics.

#### Participant #5 – Tim

Tim is a 38-year-old married man with two young children. He works in the marketplace, and his profession is fundraising.

#### Participant #6 – Joe

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<sup>236</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 98.



Joe is 56 years old and is married with grown children. He has worked on staff at a seminary for sixteen years, interacting closely with the students during that time. In addition to his work at the seminary, he is a counselor.

## **Physical Stewardship**

The first research question asked, “In what ways do Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies as a means of faithfully caring for the body the Lord has gifted them?” The first interview protocol question to address this RQ was, “What practices do you engage in for physical discipline of your body?” This protocol question was asked to ensure that the participant does engage in care for their body and to get a sense of what physical disciplines are engaged in by the participant.

## *Exercise*

Each of the participants interviewed mentioned exercise as regular physical discipline. Their preferences spanned a wide range. Sam offered that he rose early in the morning and did his exercise at home, using weights, a rowing machine, and a VersaClimber.<sup>237</sup> He added, “I alternate and usually work out anywhere from twenty to thirty minutes a day, six days a week.”

Steve worked out at a gym that is a twenty-minute drive from his home. “Most weeks, it is five to six days a week.” At the gym, his workout consisted of a combination of weights and machines. He noted, “I’m usually there thirty to forty-five minutes. On Saturday morning, I might spend an hour and a half there.” Robert, who lived in rural

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<sup>237</sup> “Versaclimber,” accessed March 6, 2025, <https://versaclimber.com/>.

America and owned a small homestead, walked five mornings out of the week, together with his wife. He said that most days he walked “three to four miles.” In addition to walking, Robert engaged in cycling, either on a stationary bike during the winter months, or outside on a road bike as the weather permitted. He used to run consistently but then pared back to walking and cycling. Robert noted that his conventional exercise was “on top of farm chores.” In the winter months, he spent “twenty to thirty minutes in the morning feeding animals, carrying hay, and throwing hay down from the loft (in the barn).”

Nathan did a combination of weights, cardio, and walking as his exercise routine. He suffered from physical ailments, so his exercise routine varied from day-to-day based on how his body felt. He mentioned, “I want to move. I want to get my heart rate up.”

Tim did a combination of running and functional movements. At the time of the interview, he was training for a specific race, and his training included CrossFit four to five days a week, and running five days a week. Tim stated that he runs a total of twenty-two miles a week. Joe used to be a long-distance runner until about six years ago. An injury forced him to stop running, so he took up cycling for two to three hours at a time. In addition to cycling, he exercised at a gym on average four days per week. He also rotated between the Stairmaster, elliptical machine, or stationary bike and then lifted weights for his upper and lower body.

### *Diet*

Diet was something that several participants mentioned as a way that they care for their body. Sam paid attention to what he ate, trying to stay away from sweets. Steve mentioned that until he was in his mid-30s, he didn’t pay much attention to exercise and

diet. He said that around age 35 he and his wife began a friendly weight-loss competition with another couple at church, and he dropped thirty pounds simply by changing his diet. He noted, “It was really watching the food and the diet and the intake and being more aware.” Additionally, Steve mentioned that he also began paying attention to when he ate certain foods. “Sometimes it was not what I ate, it was when I would eat it. If I’m going to eat junk food, I eat it for breakfast.” His understanding was that it was better for him to have the remainder of the day to burn off those calories, rather than if he consumed them right before bedtime.

Robert reported that he was always thinking about diet and what food went into his body. He said, “I’m bouncing back and forth from some kind of Keto diet and limiting carbs, white stuff, and trying to limit sugar.” Another aspect of diet that Robert mentioned was “paying more attention to alcohol intake.” He limited himself to one or two drinks per week, because he felt better and slept better when limiting his alcohol intake. Tim also reported that he cut out alcohol a year ago. He said, “One of the things I realized is what alcohol did to my sleep. No matter what amount (of alcohol) I had, it put me in a deficit for fighting temptation, for feeling good, and for thinking clearly -- not because of the alcohol itself, but because my sleep was bad. Sleep deprivation kind of leads that way.” Of particular interest was how Tim tied alcohol consumption to temptation, but specifically because it affected his sleep. He noted, “Every action has a consequence, and that consequence could be positive or negative.”

Nathan had had a twenty-year battle with physical ailments, so when it came to his diet, he stayed away from certain foods that caused inflammation. As such, he paid close attention to what he ate and how it was affecting his body positively or negatively.

Similarly, Tim found that he was “dealing with a lot of internal inflammation, which was causing chronic fatigue.” He reported that 90 percent of what he ate now was whole foods, with a single ingredient. He said, “We make most things from scratch. And that’s just because it seems to be the only place that I can get the proper nutrients that I need.”

Regarding diet, Joe mentioned that his wife was really into gardening, and she ate well. He said, “When my wife is eating healthy, I’m wanting to eat healthier, too.” He had observed that several members of his extended family were overweight, so he had had a strong desire to not become overweight. As such, his eating, he said, “is usually pretty healthy.”

### *Sleep*

Several participants mentioned sleep and good sleep habits as a way to care for their body. Sam said that if he got seven hours of sleep a night, “I’m happy.” He noted that he was usually asleep by 9 pm or 10 pm at the latest, and that he usually got up in the morning at 5am to begin his exercise and devotions. Nathan commented that sleep was an important way he cared for his body. He consistently tried to have “good sleep hygiene habits of not being on my phone before bed and wearing blue light blocking glasses at night.” He mentioned that he had a routine to prepare himself for bed, so that he would rest as well as possible each night. Tim indicated that he slept eight to nine hours each night. He said, “It’s not even a goal. I need it. It’s just like my body needs it.” Regarding sleep habits, Joe stated that he read fiction every night before bed and did not get on his phone before going to bed. He was usually good at getting six to seven hours of sleep each night, which for him was optimal.

### *Supplementation*

While answering protocol question 1, “What practices do you engage in for physical discipline of your body?” Nathan and Tim mentioned having received blood work results that showed inflammation and lowered testosterone, and so they began using supplements. Low testosterone levels can contribute to low energy, reduced muscle mass, as well as emotional changes and swings. They each reported that having blood work done was a significant part of their care for their bodies.

### *The Motivation*

The second protocol question asked, “What compels you to engage in the physical discipline of your body?” This protocol question was asked to gain an understanding of what motivated participants to engage in physical exercise, good diet or good sleep habits. Some common themes emerged in the participant answers.

Several participants mentioned that they exercised because they wanted to be healthy and feel better. When asked, Sam said, “I want to be healthy,” and “I want to stay fit.” Robert noted that at the top of the list for him was that he felt better when he paid attention to exercise, diet, and sleep habits. He said, “When I’m sweating or doing something strenuous, getting my heart rate up, I just feel better physically.” Similarly, Tim stated, “It started almost out of survival.” He wanted to feel better. He noted that for most of his life, “I felt awful.”

Weight loss was another motivation mentioned. Some had parents or extended family members who were overweight, and that was a compelling factor. Body image, or self-image as some participants stated it, was another motivating factor for several participants. Tim said that when he is caring for his body, “I like how I look. I feel

confident in my body.” Steve observed that he experienced positive self-esteem when he was doing things to care for his body. Some participants had unhealthy body image struggles as children and adolescents, so exercise and diet became a way for them to combat that struggle. Nathan noted that while growing up, he had “an insecure body image.” He said, “The weight room was always a place where I could gain some control. I was able to fashion a body image that I liked better.”

Emotional health and stress management were mentioned by a few as motivation. Robert observed that exercise specifically affected him emotionally. He said, “If I’m not exercising, then I’ll get blue pretty quick.” When asked to clarify what “blue” referred to, Robert expressed that when he does not exercise regularly, he slips into depression. Steve mentioned that he engaged in the physical stewardship of his body as a means of managing stress. He noted that the number one motivation for him was to have a healthy way to deal with all the stress that life brings. He said, “I’m going to the gym on Saturday to exert myself, not as hard work as much as it is for relaxation. When I get there, my to-do list turns off.” For these participants, the care of themselves physically was not just a means to feel better physically and have more energy. Although that was mentioned, these participants explained that care for themselves physically also affected their emotional well-being and some parts of their inward self.

A few participants mentioned that they were motivated to care for their body out of gratitude to the Lord. For instance, Nathan noted, “I want to be grateful, and use the body that God has given me in the way he’s designed me to. I think this is good stewardship.” Relatedly, while referring to why he pursued the physical stewardship of his body and why he engages in inward, heart work, Sam said, “I want to serve him and

give back to him in this life. I want to live a life as pure as I can live it. In gratitude.”

Gratitude to the Lord was a big motivation for why he engaged in various disciplines, for the formation of his body and spirit. Referring to Jesus, Sam expressed, “Because of what he’s done for me, I want to do it (physical and spiritual disciplines) out of love and service to him. I take care of myself out of appreciation.”

One answer to this protocol question was mentioned by several participants, and it was a theme that would continue through almost every interview after this protocol question. When asked about his motivation for care of his body, Robert said, “It’s a holistic thing.” He elaborated, “I figured out that for me, at least, if I’m going to be eating right, I need to be exercising. And if I am exercising, it makes it easier to eat right.” Nathan stated, “If I’m exercising and taking care of my body, I’m going to be a better father. A better husband. I can engage better with the Lord. It has a spiritual effect. It has a relational impact.” Joe said, “I love having a healthy lifestyle.” He went on to point out, “When I think of a healthy lifestyle, I think it’s all interconnected. Eating, exercise, sleep.” Undoubtedly, the notion of holism, or being disciplined in all areas of life, was the most common thread that came up from interview to interview. Overall, the participants described how care for their physical body affected their inward, immaterial aspect of they are.

### *Summary of Physical Stewardship*

The participants had various answers for how they engage the care of their bodies and why. While the specifics of how each participant exercised ranged widely, each participant mentioned exercise as one of the ways that they care for themselves. Paying attention to diet was also mentioned as a means of care for their body. Additionally, sleep

was mentioned by most participants, and the importance of sleep to their overall health was observed by a few.

As the second protocol question was asked, which gauged motive for physical care, a theme began to emerge in some interviews but would come out explicitly or implicitly in the remainder of all the interviews. The theme that emerged was the idea of holism, or discipline as a way of living. Many participants also mentioned that exercise, diet, and sleep are connected somehow. Participants reported that good exercise was a motive for eating well, to get the nutrition needed to exercise. Eating well helped fuel the desire to exercise and get good sleep.

### **Heart Work**

The second research question sought to find out how Christian men engage in heart work to fight against the temptation to use pornography. The first protocol question for this RQ was similar to the RQ itself. The researcher asked, “What practices do you engage in to grow in heart obedience toward the Lord?” Similar to the protocol questions for RQ1, this protocol question was asked to ensure that the participant engaged in spiritual disciplines that grow their heart obedience toward the Lord but also to get a sense of what spiritual disciplines were engaged in by the participant.

### *Scripture Reading*

Many answers overlapped from interview to interview, with participants referring to similar disciplines. For instance, each mentioned Scripture reading as one of the ways that they work on bending their heart obedience toward the Lord. In fact, Steve mentioned that he combined devotional study for personal edification with sermon and



teaching preparation. He said, “Much of the content of what I deliver (while preaching) is usually personal. When I’m doing sermon prep or lesson prep, it isn’t just to put out to the church, but it’s me processing it.” As further clarification, Steve added, “When I’m reading and studying, I’m trying to find where the Spirit is leading me, to then lead people.” As a pastor, Steve noticed the spiritual discipline of Scripture reading had personal and corporate ramifications. Sam reported that each day he read two chapters of the Old Testament, two chapters of the New Testament, one chapter in Proverbs, and one Psalm. Joe noted, “I’m reading through the New Testament and the Psalms this year.” Some participants engaged every day in Scripture reading, and for some it was more sporadic.

### *Prayer*

Prayer was also mentioned by most participants in the study. Robert said that his daily prayer was important for his connectedness to God. He had dedicated prayer time in the morning, usually alone to begin with, and then with his wife. For his prayer time, he rotated using Scripture, the *Book of Common Prayer*, the Jesus Prayer, continual nature prayer, and *St. Augustine’s Prayer Book*. For Robert, prayer “is good. It’s grounding. I am just aligning myself with who I am in relation to him (God) as part of that connection.” In addition to dedicated morning prayer, Robert said that he prayed throughout the day. He stated, “I want to maintain, in some practical sense, not just an ethereal thought, that God is here with me. I want to maintain that connection point to him.” He noted that the Jesus Prayer had been key in reminding him throughout the day who the Lord is and who he was in relation to God.

Like Robert's last point, Nathan stated, "My prayer life is pretty fluid. I don't have strict prayer times. It just comes and goes, and I pray throughout my day." He added, "I want to practice the presence of God throughout my days." Nathan also commented, "Prayer walks are a huge one for me. I do it at least once a week. I put my phone away and go for an hour prayer walk. It helps declutter my mind. It slows me down." Prayer walks combined physical movement and prayer, which works on the heart. In addition to prayer, prayer walks were one of the main ways that Nathan practiced another spiritual discipline, silence and solitude.

Other participants briefly mentioned prayer as well. Steve said that prayer was "a continual conversation I'm having with God about everything." Others observed that while prayer was an important spiritual discipline for them, it had been one of the harder disciplines to maintain. Joe said, "Prayer has really been a challenge at times." He went on to elaborate that it was easy to go throughout a day without praying to the Lord and attempt to do things in his own strength.

### *Community*

Church community and gathering for corporate worship service were also mentioned. Tim said an important practice for him was "engaging in corporate worship." His local church community played an important role in Tim's growth spiritually. Additionally, he mentioned accountability as an important part of what the church community did for him. He said, "I like having people who know me and will ask the right questions of me." With specific reference to church community, but general reference to all his spiritual disciplines, Tim said, "They just steep my imagination in

what's true. They orient me towards the reality of God and who he is, who I am, and the way the world works.”

Nathan observed that regular church attendance with his family, as well as regular participation in a church small group, were important ongoing practices for his heart growth. Similarly, Robert commented that an important part of his heart growth toward the Lord had been shaped by “weekly connection and worship with other believers.” He said he noticed how much it affected him to not be around believers during the quarantine period of Covid in 2020. The impact of community was felt by him, in that, “it became even more important that we were connected weekly to a larger group of believers.”

Steve also discussed the importance of Christian community. He said that community was the place where people live in the light. This was a reference to 1 John 1:6-7. “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Steve was saying that Christian community had been a place to bring his sin into the light to have it dealt with by the Lord. He added, “There’s something that exponentially happens in a community or group that does not happen one-on-one. It’s one thing if I meet with a guy one-on-one, he shares with me the deep, dark things that are going on in his life, and I share with him that I love him. He shares that with six other guys in a room and they are asking questions and they’re there, and they don’t leave him...man that’s the gospel powerfully at work.” Community, whether one-on-one or as a group, had a large impact on the spiritual discipline of believers.

### *Exercise as Heart Work*

A couple of participants stated that exercise was a form of inward heart work. Nathan said, “I would certainly include exercise in that working out is something that stirs my affection for the Lord and generates gratitude.” While not in response to this protocol question, Sam mentioned that he desired to “love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength.” He was reflecting on Deuteronomy 6:5 and Mark 12:30. Sam specifically referred to the Deuteronomy passage. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” A scribe had asked Jesus which commandment was the most important of all? Jesus’ answer is recorded in Mark 12:29-30, wherein he referenced Deuteronomy 6:5. “Jesus answered, ‘The most important is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”’” Sam reported that taking care of his body was a practical working out of that commandment for him. He asked himself regularly, “Am I taking care of the body, the temple that God has given me in a proper way that honors God?” He continued, “I feel a biblical responsibility for that sort of thing.” While not an explicit answer to the protocol question about heart work, Sam’s answer alluded to the notion that, like Nathan, his care for his body was something that also affected his heart and bent it back toward the Lord.

### *Other Literature and Podcasts*

Several participants noted that they read books other than Scripture as a discipline for inward, heart work. Sam observed that while reading Scripture or reading different books, he “will read through it, meditate on it, reflect on it and journal about it.” After

mentioning that he read books and articles, Nathan also mentioned that he listened to podcasts on spiritual formation and counseling to grow in heart work and spiritual formation. Similarly, Robert noted that he listened to a few different podcasts, one specifically related to issues of sexuality, which is “a fairly regular resource that I go to.”

The last interview protocol question was not related to a specific RQ but was related to the research as a whole. That protocol question was: “If you were to read or recommend a book, or resource, on fighting the temptation to view pornography, what might you choose?” Several participants mentioned the same resources, such as *Every Man’s Battle* and *Unwanted*. Other books or resources mentioned were *Pure Desire*, *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry*, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*, and the *SA White Book*. A significant theme from several of the interviews could be summed up by what Robert mentioned. He said, “There is nothing that I’ve ever gone to where it’s just unlocked something for me.” Like Robert, Joe said that for himself and men he had walked alongside and discipled, there hadn’t been a single book or resource that was an immediate fix. He said, “I think it’s good to read literature, and I read with other guys, but I think you have to be really careful because I feel like guys just really believe that this is the thing that’s going to do it.” Joe was highlighting the desperation that some men feel to have the next resource heal them of temptation toward pornography. Joe concluded, “I don’t believe there is such a thing.”

### *Various Disciplines*

In response to the protocol question regarding heart work, there were some answers that were only given by one participant but were significant for that participant. Some of these were sabbath rest, sermon preparation, therapy and counseling, daily

inventories (as in Step 10 of the Alcoholics Anonymous program<sup>238</sup>), spiritual direction programs, worship music, fasting, evangelism, financial generosity, and accountability to other believers.

### *Summary of Heart Work*

Similar to the wide range of disciplines that the participants do for the physical care of their bodies, there was a wide range of disciplines reported to engage in to work on their heart obedience to the Lord. Scripture reading, prayer, Christian community, exercising, reading, and podcasts were all mentioned by at least a couple of the study participants. Many other spiritual disciplines were mentioned by a single participant as a discipline they engage in to grow in heart obedience toward the Lord.

### **The Relationship**

The third research question sought to find out how Christian men relate the physical stewardship of their bodies to their success in fighting the temptation to use pornography. There were three different protocol questions asked to explore this RQ. The three protocol questions that addressed this RQ were:

1. Do you believe that there is a connection between heart work and physical stewardship/discipline? If so, would you please explain? (The first part of the protocol question was asked to gauge if the participant believed there was a connection between their care for their bodies and their inward, heart work. If

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<sup>238</sup> “The Twelve Steps | Alcoholics Anonymous,” Alcoholics Anonymous, <https://www.aa.org/the-twelve-steps>.

the participant responded “yes,” then they were asked to explain what connection they believed there was between them.)

2. How have you experienced your fight against pornography temptation affected by the physical discipline of your body?
3. When you are experiencing the most freedom from pornography temptation, what do you attribute that freedom to?

The thought behind asking three protocol questions was to address RQ3 from a few different angles. As pornography use and its temptation are often confusing for men to contemplate, and vulnerable to discuss, the researcher wanted to give the participants a few questions from different angles to get data for RQ3.

Additionally, there was one other protocol question asked during this portion of the interviews. That protocol question was:

4. How has relationship with Jesus affected the various aspects of discipline in your life?

Protocol question four was added to the interview to explore how Christian men relate their relationship with Jesus, to discipline, both physical and spiritual. This question was important to gain data about how a relationship with Jesus might tie physical discipline and heart obedience together for Christian men.

### *A Holistic and Disciplined Life*

Some participants explained how they believed that the care of their bodies affected other areas of their life. For instance, when discussing the care of his body, Robert said, “It’s a holistic thing. I think it impacts my spiritual life, and my mental life. All those things work together. It’s a holistic thing.” As the interviews moved into

protocol questions that addressed RQ3, the theme of holistic living, or living a disciplined life, became increasingly prominent in every interview. Each participant addressed this either explicitly or implicitly. Some used the phrase “holistic” to address this notion. Some used the phrase “discipline” or “disciplined life,” to address the same idea. Some just described the holism or discipline in their life.

## **Holism**

Holism is defined as, “a theory that the universe and esp. living nature is correctly seen in terms of interacting wholes (as of living organisms) that are more than the mere sum of elementary principles.”<sup>239</sup> Holistic is defined as, “relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems rather than with the analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts.”<sup>240</sup>

When asked the protocol question, “Do you believe that there is a connection between heart work and physical discipline? If so, would you please explain?” Robert returned to the idea of holism. He said, “I think about what I was saying about the holistic thing (earlier in the interview). Body, mental, spirit. If one of those things is off in some way, everything else gets a little clunky, and I feel it.” For Robert, how he was doing physically affected how he was doing emotionally, as well as mentally and spiritually. He went on to say, “When I’m eating right, drinking right, exercising and moving, I feel better all around. When one of those things is off, other things get off track in my mental

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<sup>239</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 553.

<sup>240</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 553.



state, and then my spiritual state. It's all connected, I think." In Robert's interview, the notion of living a holistic life, and how the care of his body was connected inward, heart work was explicit.

For others, the notion of holism came through in implicit ways. Nathan noted, "If I'm exercising and taking care of my body, I'm going to be a better father. I'm going to be a better husband. I can better engage with the Lord. So, it has a spiritual effect. It has a relational effect. It just makes me a better version of myself. I show up better in life." Nathan claimed that his experience of caring for his body allowed him to be the best version of himself in the various aspects of his life, including his faith. Tim implicitly discussed the notion of holism when speaking about how what he put into his body affected how he felt, and then the things he went to in order to feel better. He said, "The negative things that I put in my body (food and drink) biochemically affect the way that it operates and then by nature, the way I feel and the way that I act. When I felt a lethargy or a sleep deprivation, I just wanted quick fixes to feel good. For me, that primarily came in the form of masturbation but would at times include pornography." Tim described it as reactionary. "I just want to feel good. I just want to eat like crap. I just want to watch porn." The pattern was feeling bad, searching for anything to feel better, eating bad food as a means to soothe, and then continuing on to something else in order to cope, like pornography. Joe noted something similar. He said, "When we eat like crap, or don't exercise, we feel like crap. When we feel like crap, then we want things (often that are sinful and not good). It's a cycle. We get into that endless loop."

Tim observed that as he shifted to a routine to care for his body through exercise, diet, and good sleep habits, as well as the heart work through spiritual disciplines, "Those

quick numbing things for the sake of feeling better have diminished a lot.” This point highlights the negative and positive cycle, or loop, that humans have as holistic beings, referenced by Joe. Similarly, Steve implied that he believed there was a holistic connection between the care of the body and who humans are at the heart level. When asked protocol question one for RQ3, Steve said, “Yes, I do believe that the physical, the spiritual and the emotional are connected.”

### **Discipline**

Like the notion of holism, the idea of living a disciplined life was mentioned by several participants. They each wanted to pursue a lifestyle of discipline in every area of life, and they noticed that a lack of discipline in one area of life often extended to other areas. Sam was both explicit and implicit in his comments. When asked protocol question one for RQ3, he said, “I have found that living a disciplined life is best. I notice that if I slack in one area of my life, the others start to slide.” The idea for Sam was that if he convinced himself that he deserved a break, or a day off in one area of discipline, it was easier to convince himself that it was okay to have a day off in other areas, including obedience to the Lord. Therefore, Sam stated, “I strive to not slack in one area.” Later in the interview, he pointed out again, “You slack in one area, you start slacking in another area.” This was Sam’s reasoning for caring for his body alongside the spiritual disciplines.

Sam shared an example from his life. At the age of 16, someone gave him a subscription to *Playboy* magazine. Sam was saved when he was 24. By that time, he had *Playboy* magazines spread out on his coffee table at home. He recognized that his life and faith weren’t lining up. Something needed to change. Sam shared, “There was a whole lot

of lack of discipline in my life. I thought that the only way I can beat this is to set some good disciplines in my life to overcome it. That included physical and spiritual.” Sam began to implement spiritual and physical disciplines, and he saw progress in his fight with sin, particularly pornography. He concluded by saying, “I guess it’s a life of discipline that challenges me all the time.”

Robert mentioned that when he was pursuing discipline, physically and spiritually, he noticed a difference in his fight against pornography temptation and use. In response to protocol question two for RQ3, he said, “When I am doing that (taking care of my body), everything else is coming in line to, in terms of spirituality, prayer. I’m just more disciplined all the way around. So, it’s less of a temptation or even a thought. I’m just not going to go there.” While answering the protocol questions for this RQ, Nathan also implied that the various disciplines fed off one another, as well as the lack thereof. He said, “They are all integral pieces. If one goes, the others suffer. And eventually, they all suffer greatly.”

Joe connected a lack of exercise and eating poorly to a lack of discipline, which hinted that something was going on internally. He said, “In my own life, when I am checking out and not exercising, or not paying attention to what I eat, I notice it. If I stop somewhere and get two doughnuts, I feel my inability to be mature and disciplined in that moment. I notice there is stuff going on internally inside of me that’s causing me to want the doughnuts. That can lead to me going to other things, when I am undisciplined.” Joe alluded to a couple things. One was the idea that listening to the body, and the choices made surrounding it, can help identify spiritual and emotional conditions. The second was something that he shared right after this comment, and something that other

participants mentioned. He said, “Discipline in one area has spilled into other areas for me.” He suggested that physical discipline helped with his heart discipline and obedience, and heart discipline and obedience fueled his physical discipline and stewardship of his body.

In response to protocol question two for this RQ, Sam returned to the idea of living a robustly disciplined life. He said, “I have noticed that when I take care of myself (body), it is easier to take care of my thoughts as well. I’ve got to take every thought and make it captive to Jesus Christ.” He referenced 2 Corinthians 10:5, which is, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.” Sam contended that it was easier for him to take every thought captive when he was holistically living a disciplined life. He asked himself regularly, “Am I disciplining my body?” “Do I discipline my thoughts?” He said that he told his students often, “I don’t get up excited to work out, but I feel good when I’m done. I don’t necessarily get up excited to do devotions, but I feel good when I get done.” A disciplined life, both physically and spiritually, helped Sam to live a disciplined and holistic life in all aspects.

### *Doing Difficult Things*

During his interview, Steve relayed a story from several years ago when he was sitting in his car. At that point in his life, he had changed his diet and lost some weight, but he did little else to care for himself physically. He described that season: “My mind and my emotions [had] been pushed to the wall.” Because of stress, he was sitting in traffic, and he gripped the steering wheel hard during a tense moment in the traffic jam.

He said, “I happened to see a little bit of a bicep and some other muscles in my arm. Then I did it again. A thought hit me: my body wants to be stressed. It wants to be put under strength.” He noted that this thought connected to his body kept coming back to him in the next few days. He pointed out that it was not the muscles that caught his attention. It was “the desire to pump. To tense. To be sore. To exert.” He said, “It was like having the appetite for something you never had the appetite for. And this is probably a good one (as compared to sinful desires and appetites).” Steve observed that in the moment of gripping the steering wheel in the traffic jam, his body had clued him into an inward craving to do something hard. This notion of a connection between the body and heart accomplishing hard things came up in several of the interviews.

While answering protocol questions during this portion of the interview, Tim said that he believed that habits done over time had a compounding interest. He stated, “When you are engaged in hard things, it makes it easier to do other hard things. Your capacity to do hard things increases so that your capacity to engage difficulty just becomes normal. Then what used to be most challenging is just a cakewalk.” When Tim was exercising, he pushed himself to do another set, or another rep of the exercise movement he was currently working on. At times, he was tempted to eat poorly and had to battle the urge, or temptation, to eat poorly instead of making good choices that affected him positively. Tim suggested that his fight to keep going when exercise or diet choices were difficult, when he wanted to give in and not do the next exercise, or choose the good meal, helped him to know that he could do hard and difficult things, like resisting sin and temptation. He concluded, “My physical stewardship has affected my ability to think rightly, and to not be tossed to and fro.”

## *Release of Stress*

Humans have healthy and unhealthy coping strategies to feel better during times of stress. Viewing pornography and masturbating is a common, unhealthy strategy for many men. Steve and Robert mentioned that exercise was a healthy means for releasing the buildup of stress in their lives. Robert observed that the physical care of his body helped him fight the temptation to view pornography because it helped him fight the stress of life. He said that when he exercised, “I realize that there is some sort of release of tension, a release of stress.” He then added that he noticed when his stress was released by exercise, he wasn’t looking for some release elsewhere, like pornography.

Steve noted that his main reason for beginning and continuing to exercise was to manage stress. He observed his own stress trying to hold things together, keeping up appearances, managing life, parenting, finances, time management and commitments, and a lack of intimacy with others. He said, “When I’m working out hard and putting my body under exertion, I can’t think of other stuff at the same time. Engaging the body as hard as I want to turns the brain off when I can’t.” Steve found that the physical exertion of his body shut down some of the anxiety brought on by high stress. Steve added that stress played a role in why men do not take care of themselves and instead made choices harmful to them. He stated, “I think stress is what causes guys to not take care of themselves and to let themselves go physically, because they stress eat or they stress video game. They’ve got to fill that gap with something. It’s a circle that is going on and on.” When not caring for themselves proactively, humans look for ways to cope and feel better, often seeking out unhealthy ways.

### *Physical Care as Worship*

Several participants mentioned physical care of their body as a means by which they worship the Lord or express gratitude toward the Lord. Tim expressed, “I visualize it as a posturing, because my physical wellbeing and stewardship is simply a posturing before the Lord to be able to receive. Receive what is true about him and what he created, and about me.” Tim described the posturing as not simply a physical posturing or a heart posturing but both. “It (physical and spiritual discipline) has created this steadfastness of thought, which creates a steadfastness of relationship with God. I’m not dependent upon spiritual highs, nor am I devastated by spiritual lows. It has created a constancy for me. In my relationship with God. I don’t need to have a rollercoaster in my spirituality.” Care for his body and doing the spiritual disciplines coalesced for Tim into a more constant and real worship of the Lord.

Nathan said that he wanted to be grateful for the body that the Lord had given him, in addition to the soul that his body encapsulates. He stated, “I genuinely like working out. It’s like a gift from God that I think he wants me to enjoy.” Exercising and caring for his body brought Nathan’s heart posture and thoughts back to gratefulness and worship of the Lord who made him. He noticed how caring for his body affected his ability to relate to God. He noted, “If I’m feeling physically well, and that comes from the things that I’m doing to steward my body, well, that lends itself to being in a better space to be motivated to put myself in positions to experience God’s love and be transformed by it.” He added, “I feel more fully alive as the human that God made me to be.” Additionally, Nathan mentioned that the more he cares for his body, the more he sees what his body is capable of, the more his heart is in awe of what the Lord designed

and created. He stated, “The more we learn about our bodies and brains, the more fascinating it is to see how God has designed us.”

First Corinthians 6:19 declares, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?” Sam referenced this verse during one of his answers to these protocol questions. He said, “He (the Lord) has given me this (his body) to use. This is his body. This is his temple. So, I want to take care of that. If I misuse it; if I eat the wrong foods, don’t exercise, I am not taking care of the temple that he has given me.” Sam’s engagement to care for himself physically and spiritually bent the will of his heart toward joyful obedience of the Lord. Additionally, he observed that he desired to care for his body and soul out of appreciation – appreciation for how the Lord created him, and appreciation for what Jesus did to sacrifice himself on the cross. He said, “We’re not saved by works, but we want to serve God out of love and appreciation for him. I take care of myself out of appreciation.”

### *The Reason for the Disciplines*

At the beginning of this portion of chapter four, it was stated that an additional protocol question was added. The additional protocol question was, “How has relationship with Jesus affected the various aspects of discipline in your life?” This question was added to explore how Christian men relate their relationship with Jesus to the various aspects of discipline in their lives, both physical and spiritual. This question was important to the research to gain data about how a relationship with Jesus ties physical discipline and heart obedience together for Christian men.

A theme that came through several participants’ responses could be summed up with one word: delight. Several reported moving from a sense of duty surrounding



physical and spiritual disciplines to a sense of delight. Additionally, the target of that delight was a common theme amongst them.

During his interview, Robert said, “When I was younger, I was probably more focused on doing it right than anything else. That’s probably what motivated discipline in my life.” He was checking the boxes to say he had done the disciplines. He asserted that in his life now, “I think I can say it matters more to me now; I want to be with him (Jesus). That’s what motivates what I do, rather than checking the boxes. I pray that I’m getting to a place where being linked with Jesus, arm in arm with him, is more of the motivating factor of the things that I do in my life. To stay connected with him and close to him.” Robert implied a moving from duty to delight in his physical and spiritual disciplines, mainly because the target, the reason for doing them, changed. As he aged, the target became being connected to the Lord.

Joe commented that he also did not do the disciplines in his life for the same reasons he did when he was younger. He stated, “Back then I was doing them because I wanted to get something from God. I wanted him to change me. I wanted him to do something.” Joe shared that this reason led to frustration. “That didn’t happen. I continued to look at porn and stuff. I would just say, ‘screw it.’ I held up my end of the bargain, but evidently, he (God) doesn’t.” Somewhere in his early 30s, Joe’s motivation began to shift. He said, “My shifting has been not doing it to get something from him. Now, I just want to be with him. I didn’t before. I just want to walk with him. I want to be connecting with the Holy Spirit. When I am, I am more aware of my triggers (toward temptation).” Joe expressed a movement from trying to control God to desiring a posture of delight. His disciplines, physical and spiritual, allowed him to experience more of

Jesus, and when he did, Joe was more aware of what he desired as a whole human, both good and bad.

Having some unhealthy motivations for the disciplines in his early life, Nathan came into relationship with Jesus, and continued for some time in his faith, with some unhealthy reasons for engaging in the disciplines. He referred to them as “neurotic tendencies.” He noted, “When I first became a Christian, I carried a lot of my neuroticism into my relationship with Jesus, such that I felt like I had to do all of the disciplines in order to appease God. So, I came into my relationship with Jesus very disciplined and did all the things.” Early in his life, Nathan engaged in the disciplines to secure acceptance from the Lord. But something changed when “God freed me to experience his love and grace. To experience the love of God for me, as he transforms me into a person of love. I’m experiencing more grace and freedom now.” As the Lord began to press into Nathan the beauty of his love and grace, the target and the motivation for the disciplines changed. He said, “I’ve experienced freedom from the neuroticism to do the disciplines and actually do them as a response to God’s invitation to me to experience his love. I don’t do them now because I ‘need’ to. I do them now because God is inviting me into it, to meet him and experience his love.” Nathan claimed that the reason he engaged in physical and spiritual disciplines now was to meet with the Lord and experience his love -- not out of a sense of duty to secure acceptance from God, but out of delight in who the Lord is and what he has done for Nathan.

### *Summary of The Relationship*

The participants shared themes when discussing the connections between the care of their bodies had in their heart fight against sin and temptation, particularly temptation

toward pornography use. One of the main themes was the idea that living a holistic, disciplined life in all areas helped them fight the temptation to view pornography. These Christian men all shared that if they were disciplined in the physical care of their bodies, they had an easier time being disciplined in the spiritual aspects of their heart. They shared that if their heart was right with the Lord, they had an easier time being disciplined in the care of their body. Essentially, they noted that if they cared for themselves holistically, they showed up better as image-bearers of the Lord.

The participants mentioned other connections between the care for their bodies and their growth in heart work. Some mentioned that doing difficult things with their bodies, such as exercise or making hard choices for diet when tempted by poor choices, showed them that they could also do difficult things, especially rejecting temptation. Some participants noted that caring for their bodies released stress. As they released stress through healthy means, mainly exercising, they found that they sought unhealthy coping strategies far less, particularly pornography. Others observed that caring for their bodies was an act of worship, showing gratitude and appreciation for how the Lord created them. Lastly, many of the participants shared that over time they shifted in why they engaged in the physical and spiritual disciplines. The common theme was movement from duty or control early in life to joy and delight later in life.

## **Summary of Findings**

This chapter examined how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography. Participants described what disciplines they engaged in for the physical care of their bodies, as well as what disciplines they engaged in to grow in heart obedience toward the Lord.

Additionally, participants reported how they experienced the physical care of their bodies affecting their fight against pornography temptation.

While there were commonalities, participants described a wide range of disciplines for the physical care of their body, as well as a wide range of spiritual disciplines. A theme was that they are holistic beings and that discipline in one area of their life affected all areas of their life. Additionally, participants described that if they slacked in care for their body, they were more likely to slack in other areas and search for ways to feel better, and then more easily tempted toward pornography use and other sins.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography.

The following research questions guided the research.

1. In what ways do Christian men engage physical stewardship of their bodies as a means of faithfully caring for the body the Lord has gifted them?
2. In what ways do Christian men engage in heart work to fight against the temptation to use pornography?
3. How do Christian men relate the physical stewardship of their bodies to their success in fighting the temptation to use pornography?

### **Summary of the Study and Findings**

This study reviewed relevant literature on a theology of embodiment, a biblical framework for distorted human desires, particularly sexual immorality, and how Christian literature has addressed fighting sin and temptation, including more recent literature on fighting the temptation toward pornography use. Then the study analyzed interview data from six Christian men who had engaged in the physical discipline of their body and attributed the physical stewardship of their body to success in the heart fight against pornography temptation.

The literature review has shown that Platonic and Gnostic thought about the soul being good and the body bad has shaped portions of Christian thought throughout the

history of the church, even up to the present day. Recent Christian literature has recaptured a theology of human embodiment. Scripture makes a compelling argument that the body, far from being bad or irrelevant, was created by the Lord and should be regarded as an important part of who we are as created image-bearers. Additionally, the literature review has shown that sex was created as part of God's good design, but sin corrupted all facets of what it means to be human, including human sexuality. As such, one way that sexual immorality is expressed is through the viewing of pornographic material, which is easily accessible because of current technology. Lastly, the literature review has shown how, throughout church history, humans have been taught to fight sin and temptation in their lives. Literature was reviewed from early church fathers, Reformation thinkers, Puritan pastors, modern Christian counseling and psychology, along with literature from the field of neuroscience. The literature from the field of neuroscience indicated the benefits of exercise, diet and sleep, but is not written from a particular Christian perspective. This section of the literature review revealed how little the body has been considered as Christians throughout church history have wrestled with how to fight sin, with particular interest in how to fight the temptation toward pornography use.

The interviews revealed that Christian men who cared for their bodies and who engaged in the physical discipline of the body, through a mixture of exercise, diet, and good sleep habits, saw a connection between the care of their body and their ability to fight sin, particularly viewing pornography. Likewise, the participants observed that they noticed a connection between the lack of disciplining their body and their lack of

disciplining their heart, for instance, the desire to go to unhealthy and sinful coping strategies, namely pornography use.

## **Discussion of Findings**

In this section, the literature and interview research will be compared to identify themes, key issues, important findings, and points missing from the literature that were observed by the participants. This discussion of the findings will begin by contrasting an important key issue found in some of the literature.

### *The Real Us*

The foremost key issue that came up within some of the literature differed from the interview data. This difference concerns who the real “us” is as human beings. Is it the heart? Is the real human, and the thing that ultimately needs to be worked on and fixed, the inward part of who we are? Or is the real us the entire person that the Lord created when he fashioned Adam’s body from the dust and blew a soul into the created body? Is the real us the body and the heart together? The significance of these questions will be addressed in a later section.

### **Heart**

Lane and Tripp state, “The heart is the real or essential you.”<sup>241</sup> In a separate book, Tripp says, “The heart is the ‘real’ you. It is the essential core of who you are.”<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 14.

<sup>242</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 59.

Lane and Tripp define the heart as “All of the ways in which the Bible refers to the inner person (mind, emotions, spirit, soul, will, etc.) are summed up with this one term: *heart*.”<sup>243</sup> Tripp claims, “Though we put a tremendous amount of effort on the outer person, we all recognize that the true person is the person within. For example, when you say that you are getting to know someone, you are not saying that you have a deeper knowledge of his ears or nose! You are talking about the inner person, the heart.”<sup>244</sup> Lane, Tripp, and other Christian authors have placed an emphasis on the heart as the real, essential, and true part of who we are as humans. The words “real,” “essential,” and “true,” when used in connection to the aspects of who we are as humans, are all strong words, words indicating a higher status as compared to other parts.

Scripture highlights the role that the heart plays within our humanity. Jeremiah 17:9 declares, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” The notion that the heart is an important part of who we are, and why we do what we do, cannot be downplayed. Jesus himself confirms in Matthew 15:19, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.” But Jesus’ words in Matthew 15 indicate that the body is also involved. He says in Matthew 15:18, “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart.” These verses connect the desires of the heart with the mouth and tongue of the body that encapsulate that heart. This passage thus defines the connection between the heart and the body.

The literature review has shown that large swaths of Christianity have been and are still influenced by Platonic and Gnostic thought regarding the relationship between

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<sup>243</sup> Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 14.

<sup>244</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 59.



the body and the soul, or heart. As Anderson observes, “Traditional evangelicalism has deeply Gnostic tendencies.”<sup>245</sup> Plato believed that the body was the prison of the soul, the essential part of who we are as humans. The soul was waiting to escape the prison of the body. Gnostics, shaped by Platonic thought, continued this notion and have influenced Christianity throughout church history, highlighting the significance of what is unseen (soul), and downplaying, disregarding, or treating with contempt what is material and seen (body). Horton notes, “It would seem that the critics of modern American religion are basically on target in describing the entire religious landscape, from New Age or liberal, to evangelical and Pentecostal, as essentially Gnostic.”<sup>246</sup> According to the literature, the influence goes right up to our present day.

I have a tremendous amount of respect for Lane, Tripp, and other Christian authors who have written about the heart and the fight against sin. In a secular, Western world that largely disregards any immaterial aspect of who we are as humans, these authors have shed light on a much-needed aspect of what it means to fight sin in our lives. They are right in that fighting sin and the temptation toward pornography use is not less than doing heart work and bending our will toward the Lord. Scripture concurs with that. However, I believe that their understanding of the make-up of humans might too strongly emphasize the essentiality of the heart, to the exclusion of the body. Influenced by them or not, this understanding resembles the ideas espoused by Plato and the Gnostics, wherein the soul was the essential part of who we are as humans, and the body was, at best, irrelevant, and at worst, evil.

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<sup>245</sup> Anderson, *Earthen Vessels*, 37.

<sup>246</sup> Horton, “Gnostic Worship.”

Portions of Chapter 1 and the literature review focused on popular Christian books and literature on how to fight sexual addiction, including pornography. Much of the Christian literature, particularly from a Reformed, biblical counseling perspective, is written for Christians doing heart work to fight sin and the temptation toward pornography. Powlison encourages, “Cry out to God for mercy. That’s one-half of the battle. The other way you fight sin is to flood your heart with light. When the room of your heart is filled with light, the shadows, the darkness, and the evil will be pushed out.”<sup>247</sup> Freeman claims, “Only when your heart experiences love from a new source beyond anything it has ever known before will our heart start to move toward that source. It’ll start to be deeply changed, and that is the only way.”<sup>248</sup> What Powlison and Freeman offer is a microcosm of the wisdom in Reformed Christian literature for men seeking to get unstuck from the pattern of pornography use in their lives. They focus on mostly inward, heart work, saying little about the body and nothing about how exercise, diet, and getting good sleep aid the fight against pornography temptation (or how the lack of these would tempt us to make sinful choices).

The literature review also included literature from a broader Christian perspective, including from Christian psychologists. Similarly, this literature contained little regarding how the care of the body affects pornography temptation. My point is this: the literature that the average Christian man is most likely to access, and that is most likely to be recommended, never discusses how caring for his body, or the lack thereof, affects his temptation toward, and use of, pornography. The literature isn’t wrong. Heart work is

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<sup>247</sup> Powlison, *Sexual Addiction*, 17.

<sup>248</sup> Freeman, *Hide Or Seek*, 119.

important. But it is missing something. Perhaps it is incomplete because the concept of who we are as humans is also missing something.

## **Embodiment**

In the literature review, other Christian thinkers and authors offered something different regarding the relationship between the body and the heart, or soul. Allison states, “Embodiment is an essential feature of God’s creation of us as human beings.”<sup>249</sup> He adds, “Human nature is complex, consisting of both an immaterial aspect and a material aspect.”<sup>250</sup> The idea of embodiment is that the Lord created humans with a material aspect (body) and an immaterial aspect (heart/soul), and that the immaterial aspect dwells within and animates the material aspect. This concept was addressed when reviewing Genesis 2:7, where “The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” We as humans are these two parts, material and immaterial, and each is significant to who we are as humans, which makes us complex creatures, the complexity that Allison references. This complexity came up again and again in the interview research.

Related to embodiment, Doriani argues, “Our bodies are *us*. When we see a friend, we don’t say, ‘I see *Mark’s body*’; we say, “I see Mark.”<sup>251</sup> This is distinctly different from Tripp’s comment, “When you say that you are getting to know someone, you are not saying that you have a deeper knowledge of his ears or nose! You are talking

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<sup>249</sup> Allison, *Embodied*, 31.

<sup>250</sup> Allison, “A Theology of Human Embodiment,” 66.

<sup>251</sup> Doriani, *The New Man*, 205.

about the inner person, the heart.”<sup>252</sup> These statements seem at odds. Which is it? As we are getting to know a friend, are we getting to know only their heart? Or are we getting to know them as the entire, embodied being that the Lord created? Doriani’s argument is that when we see a friend, we see all of who they are, body and heart. We interact with the entirety of who the Lord has created as an embodied soul. As Gooder notes, we interact with “bodies animated by a vital life force.”<sup>253</sup> The vital life source is the heart, or soul, but we interact with humans and their hearts through the body that the Lord created for us. We interact with one another as entire, embodied beings.

### *Interview Findings*

I believe that getting an accurate understanding of human nature, and how body and heart interact with one another, is important to our everyday lives. It is important in our fight against sin, and especially for Christian men, for whom pornography is a serious temptation. Before noting some recommendations for practice and wrapping up the idea of why it matters, this chapter will address some key findings in the interview research to explain how Christian men can benefit from having a complete concept of themselves.

The understanding of embodiment, and the complexity of how our human nature works together, body and heart, was conveyed often in the interview research. Many of the key findings give voice to what is missing from the literature.

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<sup>252</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 59.

<sup>253</sup> Gooder, *Body*, 41.

## **Everyday Choices**

In his interview, Tim stated, “The negative things that I put in my body (food and drink) biochemically affect the way that it operates and then by nature, the way I feel and the way that I act. When I felt a lethargy or a sleep deprivation, I just wanted quick fixes to feel good. For me, that primarily came in the form of masturbation but would at times include pornography.” Similarly, Joe mentioned, “When we eat like crap, or don’t exercise, we feel like crap. When we feel like crap, then we want things (often that are sinful and not good). It’s a cycle. We get into that endless loop.” What Tim and Joe alluded to were the choices we make in the everyday moments and how those choices pressure us to choose other things, like pornography and masturbation, to feel better, because we have not taken good care of our bodies. Most men that I have interacted with as a pastoral counselor do not connect diet, exercise, and sleep to how they feel in any given moment of the day. Therefore, they see no connection in how caring for the body that the Lord created might help them in their fight against sin.

How we view the body and its significance to who we are affects how we go about our everyday lives. How we go about our everyday lives, and the choices that we make concerning our bodies, affects the way we feel. A lifestyle of little exercise, junk food, going to bed while watching Netflix on the phone, or not going to sleep until after midnight makes the average human feel bad. When we do not feel well, we usually go looking for things that will make us feel better, even if for a brief moment. For many men, that brief moment is searching out pornography and masturbating.

When we are in the “cycle,” or the “endless loop,” that Joe referred to, we live out the truth that the “heart is deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9).” The deceit comes in the form of lies, saying, “You really need this. You don’t feel well, and this will make

you feel better.” According to Tim and Joe, one way to get out of the endless loop, or to avoid it, is to treat our bodies as significant. If we appreciate them as the gift of God, as something that we are to steward well and care for, we can stop or avoid the endless loop, because we would generally feel better and go looking for sinful fixes less often. The allure of pornography might loosen its grip on Christian men, because the desire for a quick fix to feel better would be less and less.

The theology that we hold affects the way we live. It affects the everyday choices that we make, from what we put into our bodies, to how we use our bodies. If the heart is the essential, real person, we can be tempted to disregard our body and treat it anyway we like. The interview research, however, has indicated that this practical theology can tempt us into choosing other sinful behaviors. As Edwards noted, “For persons needlessly to expose themselves to temptation, and to do those things that tend to sin, is unwarrantable, and contrary that excellent example set before us.”<sup>254</sup> Holding a practical theology of embodiment and caring for the body the Lord has given us, can help us “to use our utmost endeavors to avoid sin.”<sup>255</sup>

### **Holism and Discipline**

In this study, every participant mentioned, either explicitly or implicitly, that their lives were holistic, or that living a disciplined life in one area of life helps them live disciplined in other areas. The notion of holism came through as participants talked about how exercising feeds their desire to eat better and sleep better, and as they discussed how

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<sup>254</sup> Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:227.

<sup>255</sup> Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:227.

the physical discipline of their body was connected to their spiritual discipline, and vice versa. In his interview, Robert reported, “Body, mental, spirit. If one of those things is off in some way, everything else gets a little clunky, and I feel it.” Robert specifically stated that for him, it was all a holistic thing. He added, “When I’m eating right, drinking right, exercising and moving, I feel better all around. When one of those things is off, other things get off track in my mental state, and then my spiritual state. It’s all connected, I think.”

Like Robert, Tim and Joe referred to how the care, or lack of care for their bodies, affected other things in their life. As noted earlier, Joe observed, “When we eat like crap, or don’t exercise, we feel like crap. When we feel like crap, then we want things (often that are sinful and not good). It’s a cycle.” That who we are is holistic is another way of addressing the “cycle” that Joe referred to. The heart puts pressure on the body and animates it in certain ways. The body and what it does or does not do puts pressure on the heart in certain ways. They cannot be separated into individual parts that act independently from one another. Frame reminds us, “Spirit, soul, and body should not be understood as metaphysical components of man, as distinct entities within us, battling for supremacy.”<sup>256</sup> Far from being distinct entities within us, the heart affects the body, and the body affects the heart. This is the beautiful complexity of human nature.

Discipline was another key theme mentioned by almost every participant in the study. Many stated that when they disciplined themselves in one area of their lives, be it physical or spiritual discipline, they noticed that they wanted to discipline other areas, too. Robert said, “When I am doing that (taking care of my body), everything else is

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<sup>256</sup> Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 799.

coming in line to, in terms of spirituality, prayer. I'm just more disciplined all the way around." Similarly, participants stated that when they lacked discipline in an area of their lives, and if they continued to give in to that lack of discipline, it inevitably spilled over into other areas of their lives. Sam stated, "I notice that if I slack in one area of my life, the others start to slide." Nathan said, "They are all integral pieces. If one goes, the others suffer. And eventually, they all suffer greatly."

What the interview research has revealed is that both aspects of who we are as humans, material and immaterial, matter as men consider how best to fight temptation toward pornography. The key finding in the idea of holism is that our material and immaterial aspects should not be understood as distinct from one another. This key finding affirms Frame's earlier quote that spirit, soul, and body should not be understood as distinct entities. As those trying to know ourselves, our relationship to God, and those fighting against sin in our lives, this is important to understand. One area affects another area.

The key finding in the idea of discipline is closely related. A practice of discipline in one area of our lives will affect other areas. Exercise and making healthy choices in our diet (physical discipline) can bleed over into making healthy choices to pray and read Scripture (spiritual discipline). The interview research indicated that the reverse is also true. Prayer, reading Scripture, and engaging in Christian community can influence our desire to care for the physical body that the Lord has gifted us. When we discipline ourselves in one area of life, we are more apt to discipline ourselves in other areas of life. When we slack off in discipline in one area, we are apt to slack off in other areas as well. Another finding in the interview research is related to the idea of discipline.



## **Doing Hard Things**

During his interview, Tim noted, “When you are engaged in hard things, it makes it easier to do other hard things. Your capacity to do hard things increases so that your capacity to engage difficulty just becomes normal.” When Tim didn’t want to get up early and exercise, he pushed himself to get up and go do it. When he was exercising and his body was tired, he didn’t want to do another set, he engaged in that next set or rep of exercise to push his body past what he thought he could do. When he wanted to make poor choices in his diet, he challenged himself to eat the healthy option, knowing that it was going to make him feel better. Tim reported that challenging himself with doing hard things physically, with exercise and diet, carried over into other areas of his life, even doing the hard work of fighting the temptation toward pornography use. Other interview participants shared something similar during their interviews.

Many men find the temptation toward pornography use and masturbation to be very difficult to turn away from. For many, it is difficult to be caught in the urge to fulfill a sexual desire and difficult to not give in to the urge and desire. The interview research suggests that doing difficult things in some areas of life, like doing exercise when we don’t want to, doing another set of exercise when we want to stop, or eating broccoli when what our heart desires is chocolate chip cookies, can help during the times of difficulty when the temptation to view pornography comes upon us. We have already proved to ourselves that we can withstand doing difficult things, and doing difficult things is good for us. This is not all that unlike the scientific field of hormesis.

The literature review contained a section on work done within the field of neuroscience. Lembke states that hormesis “studies the beneficial effects of administering small to moderate doses of noxious and/or painful stimuli, such as cold, heat,

gravitational changes, radiation, food restriction, and exercise.”<sup>257</sup> The painful stimuli being administered by Tim was his exercising when he doesn’t want to, doing another set of exercise when his body was suggesting it was done, and putting into his body a better fuel source, when his heart was gravitating toward junk food. And, concurring with Lembke, Tim noted that all of that was beneficial to him, not least of which was in his fight against pornography temptation. The idea of hormesis is why people do cold plunges, saunas, intermittent fasting, healthy diet choices, and exercise. Men struggling with the temptation to view pornography, who find it difficult to resist, could benefit from making difficult decisions when it comes to the care of their body. Through the physical discipline of their body, they can learn that doing hard things, stretching where we feel the difficulty, is good for us as humans. The difficulty of physical discipline may help men in the difficulty of disciplining the heart.

## **Mental Health**

As I have sat with men over the course of ten years of pastoral counseling, I have found that many men use pornography and masturbate to feel better, even if momentarily, because their mental health was in a bad place. They were depressed or obsessively anxious or worn out under the weight of stress. Some believe that they don’t measure up and have to strive to find a way to be accepted. All of this internal strain weighs heavy on the heart. The interview research suggests that ongoing care for the body can alleviate some of the weight and help men with their mental health.

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<sup>257</sup> Lembke, *Dopamine Nation*, 148.

In his interview, Robert said, “If I’m not exercising, then I’ll get blue pretty quick.” Robert slipped into depression if he wasn’t exercising regularly. He noted specifically that exercise affected his emotions. This is an example in the interview research of the body helping the inward part of the human, the heart, an example of the holistic and complex nature of humans.

Men regularly go searching for a quick dopamine hit when they are depressed to make things feel better. That dopamine hit often comes in the vehicle of pornography. The interview research suggests that, at least for some men, exercise could be not only a healthier way to get the reward neurotransmitter hit but also a preventative measure to keep men from needing to feel better in the first place.

Steve noted that his main motivation for the physical stewardship of his body was to have a healthy way to deal with stress. He stated, “I’m going to the gym on Saturday to exert myself, not as hard work as much as it is for relaxation. When I get there, my to-do list turns off.” For Steve, exercise was a way for him to alleviate stress, as the revolving list of life to-dos turns off for him while he is in the gym. He described it as a healthy release of stress.

Stress is something that affects every human being. In the Western world, we are usually too busy. We worry. We live a life with so many unknowns. We can’t see the future. That brings stress. Many Christian men do not handle the stress of life in healthy ways. They consume too much alcohol, start binge eating or excessive streaming of the next television show or video game or pornography. The interview research suggests that taking care of the body, particularly through exercise and good diet habits that help fuel exercise, is a proactive way to deal with the stress of life. If more Christian men

understood that their body mattered as much as their heart and began taking better care of themselves, the allure of pornography to “fix” the stress would grow less and less.

### **Discipline as Delight**

Another important finding emerged as the interview participants were asked how their relationship with Jesus affected the various aspects of discipline in their lives, both physical and spiritual. This question gathered data about how a relationship with Jesus might tie physical discipline and heart discipline together. The responses were stunning. Several reported that during their younger years, they practiced disciplines out of a sense of duty or earning something from God. As they grew older and continued, many reported a shift – practicing disciplines for their own delight and as worship.

In his interview, Robert said that when he was young, his motivation for doing the disciplines was to do them correctly. If he was doing them correctly, he was checking off the right boxes. He asserted, “I think I can say it matters more to me now; I want to be with him (Jesus).” Relationship with Jesus became Robert’s motivation for engaging in physical and spiritual disciplines. Joe’s motivation used to be to get something from God and thus control God. He noted, “I wanted him to change me.” Then, Joe learned to engage in physical and spiritual disciplines together as a means of being closer to God. He stated, “My shifting has been not doing it to get something from him. Now, I just want to be with him. I didn’t before. I just want to walk with him. I want to be connecting with the Holy Spirit.” Comments similar to Robert’s and Joe’s came up again and again in other interviews. The interview research suggests that as these men aged and continued to engage in physical and spiritual disciplines, their entire being, body and heart, was

drawn closer and closer to Jesus. Why? Perhaps the answer lies in another response from some participants.

When asked what his motivation was for engaging in physical and spiritual disciplines, Sam reported, “I want to serve him and give back to him in this life. I want to live a life as pure as I can live it. In gratitude.” Relatedly, Nathan noted, “I want to be grateful and use the body that God has given me in the way he’s designed me to. I think this is good stewardship.” This interview research suggests that understanding people as embodied creatures, doing both physical and spiritual disciplines, moves the entire Christian man, both body and heart, to a place of closer relationship with the Lord.

I know young Christian men who get up to read Scripture in the morning because “it’s just what Christians are supposed to do.” I know people who pray out of some robotic duty they feel they must do as a Christian. There are people who exercise and eat healthy out of pure vanity, as if their identity and acceptance come from how others view them. There is a myriad of ways that spiritual and physical disciplines can arise from a sense of duty, control, insecurity, manipulation, fear, and any number of other bad motivations. These are all disciplines done out of a sense of slavery to whatever the bad motivation is, instead of a place of delight. The interview research suggests that physical and spiritual disciplines can both be done from a place of joy, delight, and worship to the Lord who created us. The research also suggests that doing them both provides the most benefit to the whole of who we are. What would it look and feel like in our churches if more and more men caught this vision and had this experience?

## **Recommendations for Practice**

When I first began this section, what I wanted to recommend was that the church would be well advised to encourage men in the church to care for their body to fight pornography. While I believe that, and I will return to that, I believe that caring for our body is the outworking of something greater, and more important. If I were to make that the main recommendation for practice, it would stop short of the greatest help for Christian men, as well as the women and children of the church.

### *Recapturing a Vision of Embodiment*

In light of the findings described above, the church is well advised to recapture a vision of embodiment, a vision that Scripture teaches. As I stated earlier, I have great respect for Christian theologians, pastors, and authors who have taught how humans change by allowing the Lord to change the heart. I have learned a great deal from many of them, and for that, I am truly grateful for them and their work. I, however, have spent thirty plus years in the church and only heard a robust theology of the body beginning in January 2024. Something was missing from my life. As I've pastored men since that moment in 2024, I am convinced that the same something has been missing from most of their lives as well. Many men in the church do not live their everyday lives as if their body was created by and mattered to the Lord, as well as to their fight against various sins, including pornography and masturbating. We are missing a theology of the body -- a robust theology of embodiment.

## **To the Pastors**

The old saying goes: more is caught than taught. Nothing that pastors preach on a Sunday will be as impactful as what people catch by watching pastors live their lives. This is not to imply that Scripture does not teach and change people. However, the people of the church are “taught” the best when they are watching their pastor(s) live out the Scripture they are teaching. Pastors must realize that their everyday choices preach. Pastors, and the care of their body and heart, or the lack thereof, are being observed. A life lived preaches a theology. This is one of the most impactful witnesses and testimonies that pastors have.

The recommended practice here is to catch a theology of embodiment, see it in Scripture, and then joyfully and delightfully, walk in it. Pastors need to live it out. They don’t need to bite off everything at once. They don’t have to have the best exercise equipment or the financial means to buy everything organic to eat. But they could find a place in their lives to start living out a theology of embodiment in front of their congregations.

## **Sermons, Classes, Everywhere**

In most churches that I have been a part of since becoming a Christian, engaging in inward heart work as a means of fighting sin was embedded in most of what the church taught, from sermons, to classes, to Bible studies, to one-on-one discipleship and counseling. That theology was just part of the ethos of the church.

In addition to pastors catching a theology of embodiment and living it out in front of the church congregants, the church would be well advised to embed this theology in the ethos of each local expression of the church. A yearly sermon series could be

preached on a theology of embodiment. Courses and classes could be offered by the church. As a theology of embodiment and care for the body comes up in Scripture during bible studies, it can be highlighted and discussed. Churches might consider pairing an older man who does physical and spiritual disciplines out of a place of delight, with a younger man who is trying to learn and do the disciplines from the same place. When counseling men struggling with pornography addiction, pastoral counselors could ask questions not only related to heart desires but also ask questions about how the man is caring, or not caring, for his body. Counselors would then get a sense of the whole person who sits before them, and how that whole person is relating to God, to the world they live in, and to those around them. By doing these things, churches would be teaching Christian men a theology of embodiment and encouraging them to consider how the physical stewardship of their bodies aids them in the heart fight against pornography temptation and use.

### *The Academy*

While Jesus called future pastors out of fishing boats, in our day, most pastors go through years of training and preparation in seminary before going on to become pastors at a church that they apply to or are called to. Seminaries are the training ground for pastors. They produce the pastors who graduate with a certain theoretical and practical theology. While I experienced firsthand at Covenant Theological Seminary that some seminaries are teaching courses on embodiment and training students to think well about the body and the heart in relation to God, I wonder if more couldn't be added. Could one or two courses on the theology of the body be added as requirements to most MDiv programs? Could a theology of embodiment be embedded into every seminary



conversation about how to fight the temptation toward pornography use, or any fight with sin for that matter? A ripple effect in seminaries could send healthier pastors to churches, and those pastors could embed a theology of embodiment into the churches they serve, better helping and equipping the men of the church to live faithful and holistic lives.

### *Books and Resources*

As addressed in a couple places of this study, I believe that a theology of embodiment is largely missing from the resources that help Christians fighting sin, and particularly those resources for Christian men fighting the fight of pornography use and temptation. The literature review and interview research suggest a void in the literature, and yet some Christian men have stumbled upon this wisdom themselves. (I am sure this is actually the Lord's kindness to those men who have stumbled into it). More men in the church need this wisdom. More young men need to care for their heart and their body, as holistic image-bearers, before they get entrapped in severe addiction to pornography, an addiction that may have been avoided, stopped, or curbed by more complete theology. I believe that the church would be well advised to assemble resources on fighting pornography that address the holistic and complex nature of who the Lord has created us to be. We need books and articles that the everyday Christian man struggling with pornography will search out, that will instruct him not only in the heart work required to fight the temptation, but also in the care of his body, because that care matters in the fight.

### *Small Things*

As I sit back and read the study, I acknowledge that these may seem like small things. Does exercising really make that big of a difference? Can changing diet be that helpful? The interview research has shown that the cumulative effect of these practices, done from a place of delight, when coupled with the heart work and discipline that we also need to do in life, is to draw us closer to the Lord. We thereby reject sin, like the sin of pornography use, because it pales in comparison to Jesus. I don't believe they are small changes, nor that a theology of embodiment is a small difference.

Lastly, these may seem like small changes at first, but if they benefit even one person from going to pornography one less time in their day or their week, it is worth it. If small changes save one marriage because a man begins to change, the small change is worth it. If one man's life is changed because the allure of pornography lessens its grip on him as he engages in the physical and spiritual disciplines, drawing all of who he is closer to God, those changes are not small, and they are in an eternal sense, worth it.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study focused on how Christian men engage the physical stewardship of their bodies to aid in the heart fight against the temptation to use pornography. As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the research can be. Therefore, pursuit of the following areas of study could be highly valuable.

Due to the sensitive nature of pornography and sexual behavior, this study was limited to Christian men. Further research is needed to broaden the participant selection to include how Christian women might relate the physical stewardship of their bodies to the heart fight against pornography use. Would there be comparable themes and patterns

in the data? Similarly, would there be any discrepancies between what women might share and what men shared? Would there be new themes and patterns that didn't show up in the interviews with men? In any case, it would likely lend breadth to how a theology of embodiment directs the lives of all in the church.

This study assumes that a theology of embodiment can help Christian men, as well as others in the body of Christ, fight the various sins that plague us. Further research is needed to broaden the scope of how a theology of embodiment would affect other sin struggles. If future interview research indicates that it does, the literature written for Christians on how to fight that sin would need to add a theology of embodiment.

Lastly, as technology improves, the field of neuroscience is showing fascinating things that happen in the brain, perhaps as a result of sin, or something in the brain that puts pressure on the heart to animate the body toward sin. Further research could explore the relationship between neuroscience and a theology of embodiment. Perhaps such research might close the "gap" between Christianity and science.

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