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Finally Free

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Foreword

Picture your life as a room.

Beautiful hardwood floors are swept clean. Sunlight streams through windows. Photos of family and friends hang on the walls. The furniture is arranged just how you want it—for maximum usefulness and comfort. The room is peaceful. It's just right.

But in a corner hidden by shadows, in a tiny crack between two floorboards, a small, ugly weed has sprouted.

The weed represents pornography.

It's so small. It's easy to hide. You can cover it with a rug or chair. You can ignore it and downplay its significance. There are so many other good and beautiful things to enjoy in the room of your life.

But the weed grows ... and grows.

Its thorny, twisted vines steadily spread across the floor and climb the walls. They wrap themselves around tables and chairs. They even grow over the windows—blocking out the sunlight. Now no part of your room is untouched. Everywhere you turn, the weed has invaded and is choking out life. You feel like a prisoner.

I don't know how big a problem pornography is for you. Maybe this weed has overtaken your life. Or maybe it's just beginning to grow. If you're like many people, you've tried to uproot it with little success.

The problem is that too many of us use ineffective tools. Picture that tough, thorn-covered weed. And then imagine yourself trying to dislodge it with a plastic fork. A toothpick. A flimsy straw. These are the kinds of useless tools we're

working with when we try to change deeply rooted habits with mere willpower, personal resolutions, and self-centered, worldly sorrow.

We need better tools.

And that's what *Finally Free* is all about. Using simple, non-nonsense language, Heath Lambert walks into the pornography-defiled room of your life with a huge box of tools. He gives you gloves. He gives you shears. He gives you a shovel. He hands you an ax. He pulls out a blowtorch!

The reason these tools Heath shares are so effective is that they're thoroughly biblical and sharpened by grace. Heath doesn't just call you to action; he calls you to grace-motivated, Spirit-empowered action. I've read many books on sexual purity (I've even written one myself), but this one is at the top of my list of favorites. I found myself praying as I read it that God would use it in the lives of millions of men and women who are right now enslaved to pornography.

The best thing about this book is that as you read it, your preoccupation won't primarily be the ugliness of the weed you need to kill—or even the effectiveness of the tools it will teach you to use. Page by page, you'll become more and more aware that Someone is with you in this fight.

Finally Free will help you grow in your awareness of the presence and power of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer—the One who promised to never leave you, the One whose death and resurrection for you has broken the power of canceled sin. It's your union with Jesus—his life in you—that is your hope.

So take up these tools with faith. Jesus is with you.

That weed is going to die.

Joshua Harris, lead pastor of Covenant Life Church, Gaithersburg, Maryland, and author of *Humble Orthodoxy: Holding the Truth High without Putting People Down*

INTRODUCTION:

The Purpose of This Book

This book is not about pornography. You can find countless books *about* pornography. They include detailed information about the pornography industry—how many movies are made, what kinds of movies are made, how many people are involved, how much money is spent, and how many Internet sites are devoted to it. In this book, you will not find any information about the pornography industry.

Other books *about* pornography include long discussions about the damage pornography does—the layers of damage done to actors, the moral erosion within societies that embrace it, the physical and spiritual harm done to viewers, the carnage inflicted on marriages, the pain that afflicts the children and parents of consumers, and the incredible difficulty of defeating its temptations. This book is not about the catastrophic effects of pornography.

Other books *about* pornography spend a lot of time telling people how to think about pornography—how it is bad, how it stands in opposition to the kingdom of Jesus, how it goes against committed marital love, how it impedes ministry productivity, and how it harms one’s Christian witness. It is not the purpose of this book to rewire your brain when it comes to pornography.

The goals of these other books are noble. There is a time and place to talk about all of these issues. But this book has a different purpose. For the past decade, I have spent thousands of hours talking with hundreds of people who struggle with pornography. I have never met anyone who experienced profound change because someone told them how many billions of dollars are spent on pornography every year. I have never met anyone whose life was radically changed by hearing (again) how damaging the pornography industry is and how they desperately need to think differently about it. Rather, every person I have ever talked to who sincerely wanted help already knew most of this information. People who are trapped in the deceitful web of pornography do not need more information *about* pornography.

This book is about something much better than pornography. This book is about the amazing power of Jesus Christ to free you from pornography.

In this book, I want to share with you the amazing depth and effect of Christ's power to eradicate pornography from your life. Whether you struggle with pornography yourself or are trying to help someone who struggles, I have good news for you: no matter how intense or long-standing the struggle, it is the work of Jesus Christ to set people free from such sin. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul:

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: *Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

1 Corinthians 6:9–11, *emphasis added*

Do you see the power available to those who trust in Christ? Paul moves from condemnation to confidence. First, sin is powerfully condemned. The words are clear: if you are sexually immoral you will not inherit the kingdom of God. All those who look at pornography have only a fearful expectation of condemnation. Thankfully, Paul does not end there. He moves toward confidence in our Redeemer, Jesus. Jesus cleanses sinners. Jesus loves to cleanse those who love to look at pornography, and he loves to give them power to change. Our sinfulness does not get the final word. Instead, Jesus justifies, washes, and sanctifies us. Our only hope is in a risen Savior who has the power to bring us out of the pit of pornography. This book is a guide to the exciting process Jesus uses to do this work.

Jesus' power is extremely practical, and so this book is practical as well. Jesus will set you free from your struggle, but he also calls you to participate in his work. Again Paul writes, "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12–13).

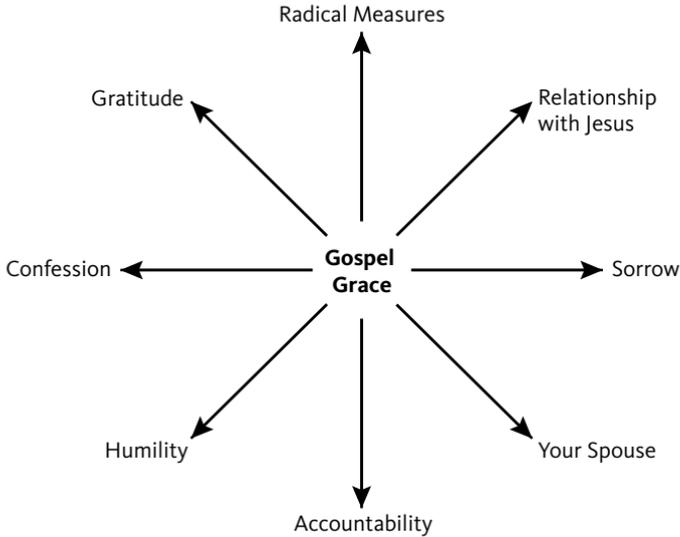
God works in us so that we desire him and work for his good purpose. As Christians, we are able to do the work of obedience, but all of our growth is empowered by God's grace. Jesus gives us power to obey so that we can obey to the glory of God. Believers are called to lean on his strength, lay hold of practical means of grace, and take practical steps toward change.

For many years, I have counseled people who feel locked in a losing struggle against pornography. They need grace-

filled, practically relevant strategies as they seek to flee sexual immorality. This book provides eight clear strategies to help you work out your salvation and experience freedom from your desire for pornography. These strategies are tools designed to help you turn from sin to righteousness based on the work of Christ. I have seen them work time and again. I pray you will see them work in your life and in the lives of those God has given you to help.

I hope you find this book practical and saturated with grace, but I also hope you find it to be pure. I have talked with more pastors, parents, and parishioners than I can count who are disappointed in the books available on pornography. They are disappointed because many of the resources they turn to for help are full of shocking—sometimes even vulgar—language. The resource they turned to for help often provided further temptations for the struggle they were trying to flee. I understand that. So does Paul: “Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving” (Ephesians 5:3–4).

It is sad that many employ impure, filthy, and crude language in resources designed to help people fight sexual immorality. We cannot attain purity and morality by using language that is impure and immoral. Yes, it is important to speak frankly about sin—to “be real” about the sins we commit and the temptations we face. However, it is possible to be frank without being filthy. With this in mind, I want to promise you I will use no language that is vulgar, crude, impure, or otherwise filthy in this book. As a father of three



young children, I want to write a book that, should they ever need to read it, would not embarrass me and would not tempt them to impurity. I hope you will have similar confidence in reading this book and in commending it to others.

This book begins with the foundation of grace. Every chapter after the first one explains another essential step in being free from pornography. Please don't think the book starts with grace in chapter 1 and then moves on to other things in the subsequent chapters. Grace is the force that motivates and empowers *every* strategy in the book. The diagram above illustrates how every strategy is founded and dependent on grace.

Every strategy you employ in your fight for purity must be grounded in the grace of God in Christ if it is to lead to lasting freedom. In this vein, I have a recommendation about how to read this book.

Chapter 1 deals with the foundation of the gospel, because no strategy to combat sin can bring profound and lasting change if it is disconnected from the power of Jesus. Strategies are important, but they must flow from the gospel. If you are trying to help a person who is struggling with pornography, it will be wise to read this book all the way through before helping that person. Doing so will give you a sense that practical strategies must flow out of principled commitment to the gospel.

If you are personally struggling with pornography, it is fine to read this book from beginning to end. It may be a good idea, however, to begin with chapter 4's teaching about radical measures before returning to the beginning to read from there. Some of you will be so submerged in a pornographic lifestyle that the gospel teaching at the beginning will best take root *after* you have taken some steps to remove porn from your life. Taking steps like the ones suggested in chapter 4 will never be the long-term fix for your struggle, but doing so can create some space for you to be able to consider the gospel.

This book is for everyone who needs help in the struggle against pornography. Even though I have never met most of you, I know you. I have sat with you in your living room, warned you of the dangers of the sin you are committing, cried with you in your brokenness over that sin, and walked with you in your journey toward change. I know you desire to be finally free from the bondage of pornography. My prayer is that this book will help you fight for purity with the power of grace.

CHAPTER 1

Grace as the Foundation in the Fight against Pornography

Matt is a nineteen-year-old college student who discovered pornography at the age of eight when his uncle showed him a video and told him not to tell anybody. Taylor is thirty and never even thought about pornography until succumbing to the temptation of an advertisement in a hotel room on a trip out of town. Ethan has been married for ten years and saw a report on the news about the pornography industry one evening. His curiosity was piqued, and he searched the Internet “just to see what all the fuss was about.” Sarah is a single thirty-five-year-old who began looking at pornography as a way to fantasize and get her mind off her loneliness.

I know dozens of people (men and women) who struggle with pornography. Each was introduced to pornography in a different way. Some people sought it out, while others were introduced to it by sinful people. Regardless, pornography

has now chewed them up and spit them out. At the beginning of the journey, watching people commit acts of sexual immorality seemed fun, intriguing, comforting, and exhilarating. Now, the sin has bitten back hard. Their hearts are weighed down with guilt, their relationships are strained, their view of sex is corrupted, and their Christian witness is marred.

I know these people. They are my brothers and sisters in Christ. I have sat with them, cried with them, and talked with them for hours. I have seen firsthand the carnage that pornography has inflicted on their lives. Perhaps you or someone God has given to you to help can identify with their stories.

Perhaps you, like them, began to look at pornography with rationalizations that made a certain amount of twisted sense at the time. *How bad can it be? It's just this once, then never again. My spouse doesn't seem that interested in me. It might actually help our marriage for me to have another sexual outlet. I'm sick of feeling lonely. I deserve this.* Now, the sandy foundation holding up those lies has eroded, and you are in turmoil. You desperately want help to get out of the mess, but you don't know how—or even where to begin. In fact, you are deeply afraid you're so trapped that there may be no means of escape.

If this describes you, then I have breathtakingly good news to offer: Jesus Christ died to set you free from every sin that can be committed. That includes pornography.

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned

and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

Romans 3:21–25

It is possible to be free from pornography. Because of his grace, God sent his Son to pay the just penalty for the sins we all commit. When you believe in God's grace toward you, you get God's righteousness. You can be forgiven and free when you trust in Christ and what he has done for you, no matter how many times you have looked at pornography and how hopeless the struggle can feel. When this seems like it isn't true, it's because you are thinking more about yourself and your porn than you are about Jesus and his grace. You can be free, but freedom requires grace.

It is a wonderful blessing to live in a time and place in which large numbers of Christian leaders and laypeople are focusing on the gospel of Jesus in new, fresh, and powerful ways. Multiple books, sermons, and blogs describe the rich resources of grace that overflow from the good news about Jesus. While this current emphasis is admirable, there is a danger that grace can become a topic we discuss rather than a power we experience. We can never be saturated with too much grace. The danger in our day is taking grace for granted and not considering how to make it practical.

I want to heed my own warning. I don't want to just talk about grace in this book; I want to show you how you can make use of the grace of Jesus in your fight against

pornography. In Romans 1:5, Paul writes, “Through [Jesus Christ] we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.” Here Paul is teaching that God has given his people grace so that they are able to obey and bring honor to the name of Christ among the nations. Grace is not merely “unmerited favor” —that God has a pleasing disposition toward us; grace is also *power*. Grace is divine strength given to us so we can live in ways that please God. God is calling Christians to obedience in Romans 1:5. He is also promising that we will have the power to accomplish this obedience. God’s gift of grace is the power to obey.

I want to show you how to seize two important aspects of God’s grace in your struggle against pornography.

Forgiving Grace

The first thing you absolutely must know about God’s powerful grace is that through grace God *forgives our sins*. Listen to what the Bible says about this forgiving grace in Colossians 2:13–14: “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.”

God describes in shocking terms how we can have these amazing blessings. We have life and forgiveness—but these things do not come cheaply.

Paul gives a sobering illustration of this when he compares the sins we have committed to a credit card bill—a “charge of our legal indebtedness.” The sins we commit do

not vanish into the air, but are documented and preserved. Just like we must pay our credit card bills to avoid legal penalties, so the record of our sin debt makes demands on us that are legally binding. The legal demand of our sin debt is divine punishment. Sin must be paid for. But here we discover a glorious truth: even though you and I are entirely and solely responsible for our sin debt, God makes provision for the debt himself by nailing that debt to the cross of Christ and satisfying its demands. When Jesus was crucified on the cross, he paid for all of our sin. Every instance of treasuring images of sexual immorality in our hearts, every eager glance at pornography, all of our lustful gawking—everything—is paid for by Jesus in his death for sinners.

Transforming Grace

The news gets even better. Forgiving grace is only one part of the power Jesus gives. God's powerful grace also gives us *strength to live in new ways*. Forgiving grace is wonderful and essential, but sinners need more than forgiveness. It's not enough that our record of debt is paid; we also need grace to live like Jesus; we need grace that changes us so we can be like him in his holiness and love. In Romans 6:4, Paul declares, "We were therefore buried with [Christ] through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Paul is talking about the death and resurrection of Jesus. For all who trust in Jesus, his death and resurrection is also *our* death and resurrection. Jesus' death and resurrection not only pays off our record of debt and gives us forgiving grace; Jesus' death and resurrection leads to our transformation.

Through God's transforming grace we can live a new life because of what Jesus has done for us.

Many people spend a lot of time pursuing forgiveness. They beg and plead for forgiveness after indulging in pornography, but they don't know what to do next. The Bible teaches that in addition to confessing sin and seeking God's forgiveness, you need to pursue God's powerful transforming grace by believing the good news and walking in faith and obedience to the gospel. God's grace pardons you and forgives your sin, and God's grace empowers you to live differently and be obedient to him.

Oh, how you must treasure the sweetness of this grace! You need to ask for forgiving grace after you look at pornography, but don't stop there! Ask for God's transforming grace, his power to change you from the inside out. Because God is faithful to his Word and his promises, over time you will receive God's power to never look at pornography again. God's powerful transforming grace *can* give you a pure heart, and you *can* subdue your desires for pornography. You *can* honor your brothers and sisters in Christ when you look at them instead of dishonoring them. You can have all of this, and more. You just can't get it in your own strength and effort. You need the powerful transforming grace of Jesus.

God's powerful transforming grace is available to you, but many people don't know how to make use of it. Having the power of Jesus to change without knowing how to use that power is almost like not having the power at all. It's like being stranded on an island with a fueled-up airplane you don't know how to fly. It is crucial to discover how to grasp God's grace if you are going to benefit from it. If you want to use Jesus' transforming grace, you have to do something so easy that many people find it impossible.

You have to *believe* it.

Transforming grace works when you believe that Jesus gives it to you. The moment you believe in Jesus' grace to change you, you *are* changing. The more you continue to believe it, the more you will continue to change.

Paul writes, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). Paul is saying that you are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ when you *count* it to be true; that is, when you believe it. If you want to change and be like Christ—whether in the area of pornography or anything else—you must believe that in Jesus you have the power to change. When you believe the power is yours, it is yours.

Repentance and Grace

Forgiving grace and transforming grace are crucial for Christians to embrace. Repentance is the way we grasp and unite these two essential aspects of God's grace. In the aftermath of sin, we must learn to interact with God through repentance. In the Bible, repentance describes the process of moving from sinful living to obedient living. When we repent, we must always take at least three clear steps. You can remember these three essential steps by using the acronym CAR.

The first step in the process of repentance is to *confess* your sin. The apostle John writes, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8–9). Sinners need grace more than anything else, including the grace to recognize and admit our sin. We reject grace when we deny our sin, according to John. When you deny

your sin, you deny yourself access to God's grace. When you admit your sin to God, you access his grace. The first step in repentance is to talk to God and tell him about your sin. He already knows this, of course, but we still need to tell God about the sin we are aware of in our life. In a marriage, when a husband has an angry outburst and speaks harshly to his wife, he must still admit his wrong and seek forgiveness—even though she experienced it and knows it happened. In the same way, every Christian who struggles with sexual immorality needs to humble himself or herself before God, telling God what he already knows.

The second step in the process of repentance is to *affirm* God's forgiveness of your sin. John provides two directions to follow (see 1 John 1:8–9). First, he gives a command to obey: you must confess your sins. Second, he gives a message to believe: when you confess your sin, God is faithful to forgive and cleanse you. It is easier to talk to God about your sin than it is to believe you are forgiven. Perhaps this is your struggle.

You may find yourself thinking about all the pornographic images you've seen, the lustful heart you've nurtured, or the number of people broken by your immorality. These sorrows are part of the consequence of sin. When you dwell disproportionately on your sin and its consequences, however, you are neglecting God's grace. There is a time and a place to be broken over your sin and to soberly consider its consequences (the next chapter is devoted to this topic). After you have confessed your sin, however, you must fight to affirm what God says about you. For all who confess their sin, God pronounces the verdict "forgiven" and "clean." If God pronounces you forgiven and clean, you *are* forgiven and clean. While it may seem humble and modest to question God's forgiveness, it is actually prideful and arrogant to refuse to

believe what God declares to be true about you. Repentance means affirming what God says about you.

The third step in the process of repentance is to *request* Jesus' grace to change. We have already seen the amazing power available to Christians in the work of Jesus. We must also recognize the biblical warning that is too often true of us as prayerless followers of Jesus: "You do not have because you do not ask God" (James 4:2). Having confessed your sin and trusted in God's forgiveness, you now need to ask God for the specific grace to be different.

It is important to talk about repentance because repentance is the means by which you lay hold of Jesus' forgiving and transforming grace. It is possible to talk about how grace forgives and transforms us but never actually experience those graces. God does not just want us to know about these graces; he wants us to live them out. The way we practically live, experience, and are transformed by the grace of Jesus is to talk to God about it. Asking for and believing in God's forgiveness of our sin and his power to change us is essential to experiencing it.

Knowing this changes the way we will respond to failure in the battle against pornography. We typically respond to moral failures with mental punishments. You've probably experienced this. You sin and look at pornography. Then you start thinking, *I'm terrible. I'm awful. What was I thinking? If my friends knew what I was doing, they would never talk to me again. I can never be in ministry if I don't quit doing this. What if my spouse finds out? What if my girlfriend finds out? What if my parents find out? What if my pastor finds out? What if people at church find out? I don't deserve to be a Christian. Maybe I'm not a Christian.* On and on and on it goes. You cycle through these mental punishments that grow out of guilt and fuel even more guilt.

None of this is helpful, but it's what most people do in their struggle with pornography and lust. Mental punishments are not helpful because they deal with sin in a self-centered way instead of a Christ-centered way. Meditating on how miserable and pathetic you are only perpetuates the sinful self-centeredness that led you to look at pornography in the first place. Condemning self-talk still has you standing center stage as you reflect on what you think about what you have done, and as you describe what you think you deserve because of what you did. It's all about you. The problem is there is too much you in all this. You need Christ. And the only way to break the vicious cycle is to get outside of yourself to Jesus. You need to stop talking to yourself in categories of condemnation and begin talking to God in categories of confession.

What I just shared with you is a big deal. You should pay attention to it and reread it if you didn't catch it. As the Lord sets you free from the sin of pornography, this will be one of the biggest changes he will make in your life. You will learn to stop responding to pornography by talking to yourself with condemning words and thoughts and start responding to your sin by talking to God with prayers of confession. Self-talk and self-condemnation do nothing to lay hold of God's forgiving and transforming grace. Repentance does.

The tide will begin to turn in your struggle against pornography when you begin to grasp forgiving grace *and* transforming grace, as you learn to repent. To experience freedom, you must repent. You will need to come to Christ in your brokenness, frustration, disgust, and shame. You must talk to him about it. Tell him what you did. Tell him what you were thinking and wanting. Be honest. Cry and ask him to

forgive you. Ask him for grace to be different. As you do this, you are moving away from trusting in yourself as the solution to your sin and approaching the throne of grace where Jesus is ready to respond with mercy to help you in your time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Hope and Grace

God's grace gives birth to hope. There is a good chance you've picked up this book in despair. Perhaps you recently indulged in pornography for the zillionth time and have finally had enough. Perhaps a spouse, parent, coworker, or law enforcement authority discovered your secret indulgence and now you're in trouble at home, church, or work, or with the law. Regardless of your exact circumstances, you're despairing that change can ever be possible.

It's not as though despair is unreasonable. It makes sense to despair as you look at a devastating problem that has hooked millions of people before you and will trap millions more after you. It makes sense to despair as you look at life-altering consequences—a broken relationship with the Lord, a damaged relationship with your spouse, suspicions from your children, parents, or friends, and a lost job or ministry position. It makes sense to despair as you look within and see a total inability to change by means of your own resources. There are many legitimate reasons to despair when you consider these bleak realities.

The logic of despair is broken by the miracle of grace. The power of God melts despair when you grasp his forgiving and transforming grace through repentance. Pornography is a plague that has destroyed countless lives and can also

destroy yours. The sobering truth is that you do not have the resources to change within yourself.

“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more”
(Romans 5:20).

No matter how terrible pornography is, no matter how much trouble you are in, no matter how flimsy and weak your resources are, you are never in a pit so deep that the grace of Jesus cannot lift you out. The great danger in your struggle is that you will devote all of your energy to thinking true and awful things about pornography and spend no time dwelling on the true and wonderful things about Jesus.

There is no porn user so enslaved that Jesus cannot set him or her free. There is no struggle for purity so intense that Jesus' grace cannot win the battle. There is no consequence so steep that Jesus' power cannot carry you through. Jesus' grace to change you is stronger than pornography's power to destroy you. Jesus' grace is stronger than your own desires to watch sex. While there is no hope for you in looking at pornography, there is all the hope in the universe when you look to God and his grace.

Hope for lasting transformation begins when you cry out to God in repentance and plead with him for his forgiving and transforming grace. When you ask for these things in faith, *he will never deny them to you*. This prayer is the very first step you must take as you turn away from pornography. God's grace is available to you right now. Do not turn the page until you sense that you have encountered God's grace in repentance. When you are ready to turn the page, I will begin to unfold eight practical elements of God's transforming grace that he delights to grant to his loved ones who ask.

Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace

1. Pray to God right now and confess your sin of looking at pornography. Seek God's forgiving grace from this sin.
2. As you pray, ask God for his powerful transforming grace to bring change to your life.
3. Don't stop praying until you truly believe that these graces are yours in Christ.

