

# SESSION 6

## READY WHEN PORNOGRAPHY CONTROLS

---

### *The Point*

We should work to keep any sin from alienating us from God.

---

### *The Bible Meets Life*

Because of sin, culture has made sexuality an idol and condones sex based on opinions not grounded in biblical truth. Pornography—which is so readily accessible today—turns people into objects and cheapens God’s gift of sex. The battle of pornography must be fought in the mind and body. This is a daily battle where victory comes only by surrendering to the authority of Christ in every area of life. Jesus can heal the heart and mind and bring freedom to those trapped in this addiction.

---

### *The Passage*

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

<sup>3</sup> For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality,

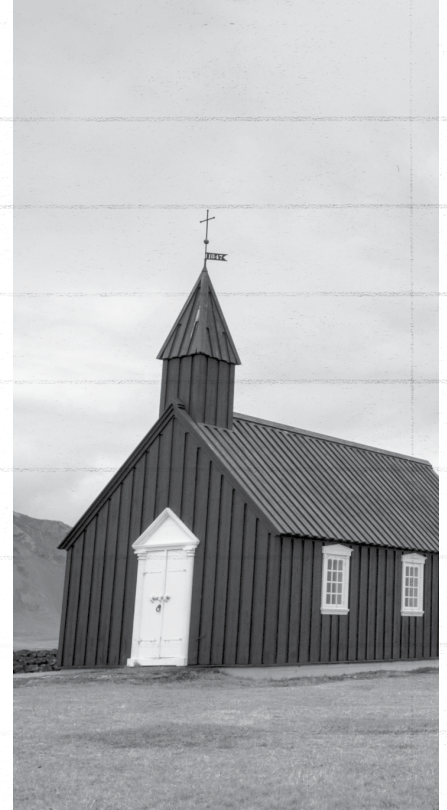
<sup>4</sup> so that each of you knows how to control his own body in sanctification and honor,

<sup>5</sup> not with lustful desires, like the Gentiles who don't know God.

<sup>6</sup> This means one must not transgress against and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses, as we also previously told and warned you.

<sup>7</sup> For God has not called us to impurity but to sanctification.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the person who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who also gives you His Holy Spirit.



## THE SETTING

Paul had established the church in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey. While some Jews received his message, many did not. Some of the latter incited a mob, accused Paul of acting against Caesar, and sought to drive him out of town. They even followed him to Berea and stirred up trouble there. Out of concern for the believers in Thessalonica, Paul wrote to encourage them in the faith, including in the ethics of the faith in chapters 4–5.

# ENGAGE

(15 MINUTES)



## GET INTO THE STUDY

**ENGAGE:** Begin the session with one or more of the **Engage Options** on the next page. (This is optional. If you'd rather skip the **Engage Options**, just begin with the first discussion question.)

**SAY:** Because of sin, culture has made sexuality an idol and condones sex based on opinions not grounded in biblical truth. Pornography turns people into objects and cheapens God's gift of sex. Jesus can heal the heart and mind and bring freedom to those trapped in this addiction.

**DISCUSS:** Instruct students to discuss the question, "Why is it so difficult to keep some secrets?"

**GUIDE:** Call attention to **The Point**. Explain that this is the key idea to keep in mind throughout the session.

ITEM  
14

**Leader Pack:** Use the *Pornography Quote* poster to help in discussion of the quote in the Personal Study Guide.

THE POINT

*We should work to keep any sin from alienating us from God.*

**READ:** Read and summarize **The Bible Meets Life** for your group.

Some secrets are fun, like knowing about a surprise party, knowing the best place to fish, and knowing the secret to an illusion. Some secrets, though, are anything but fun. In fact, we may wish some secrets would stay deeply buried. For example, the number one secret in America might be who looks at pornography consistently. 13 percent of all web searches are related to erotic content. Almost 9 out of 10 young men (87 percent) and 1 out of 3 young women (31 percent) report viewing pornography. We don't like talking about pornography, but it's not limited to the secular world—50 percent of Christian men and 20 percent of Christian women regularly view pornography. So what does the Bible have to say about this tsunami of sexual content that's washing over our communities? Sexual temptation and immorality were major issues in the early church, which is why the apostle Paul had much to say about sexual purity.

**PRAY:** Transition into the session by interceding for those that may be trapped in the addiction of pornography. Ask the Holy Spirit to work through their lives to bring them freedom.

# Engage Options

## ► *Lead with Action*

Prior to the session look at the Covenant Eyes or XXXchurch websites and write down 7-10 statistics about pornography. Give 5-8 students a note pad and pen or a dry erase board and marker. Have them stand in front of the crowd and give them true or false, multiple choice, or fill in the blank questions from the statistics you wrote down. Have them write their answers on their pad or dry erase board, showing the audience their answers. Ask, **“Which statistic was most shocking to you?”**

## ► *Lead with Atmosphere*

Have an item that students really like or want (like candy, a gift card, headphones, etc.). Hopefully you can find something that is already broken but isn't obvious to students it is broken. Get students all excited about the possibility of owning the item in your hand. Ask your students, “Who wants this?” Then take a marker or paint and write or paint all over it. Then say, “Who still wants this?” Continue to damage the item. Ask again, “Who wants this?” Lastly, break it into a couple of pieces and say, **“Who wants this now? The once great prize is now something of little value. Pornography takes a beautiful gift God has given us called sex and cheapens it with every glance.”**

## ► *Lead with Media*

Have your students watch Nate Larkin's story at IAmSecond.com. Say to your students, **“Pornography ruled Nate's life, but God released Nate from the prison he was in. Jesus healed his heart and mind and used Nate's story to help others find freedom.”**

**OPTION:** *Decorate your meeting space like a jail or dungeon. Tell your students that we would never purposely choose to be imprisoned, but we are unknowingly doing just that when we allow pornography into our lives.*

**OPTION:** *Nate Larkin's story is very powerful but may be too mature for your students. If this is the case, search the Internet for other testimonies about freedom from the addiction of pornography that are more appropriate for your group.*

## STUDY THE BIBLE

*The Point: We should work to keep any sin from alienating us from God.*

<sup>3</sup> For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality,

—1 THESSALONIANS 4:3

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4:3

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read the following:

Paul said it is God's will for us to be sanctified, and in verses 3-6 he gave us three ways that we can be sanctified or "set apart":

- ▶ Avoid sexual immorality
- ▶ Practice self-control
- ▶ Don't take advantage of others

The root word for immorality in Greek is *porneia*. It is the root word from which we get our word *pornography*. The word was used to refer to all sorts of sexual distortion: adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and all behaviors associated with those sins—including sexual fantasies and lust.

Avoiding sexual immorality requires resolve and diligence. Even if you don't go looking for sexual content, it is likely to come looking for you.

- ▶ Seven out of ten youth have accidentally come across pornography online.
- ▶ Nearly 80 percent of unwanted exposure to pornography takes place in the home.

When it comes to sexual temptation, the Bible says to "run" (1 Cor. 6:18). So, when it comes to the temptation of pornography, we would be wise to avoid situations where we know we will be tempted. Wise people see the danger before them and take precautions to protect themselves against it.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, "Why do you think pornography is so addictive?"

**SAY:** The truth is most people in the world understand that pornography is dangerous. Most of us reading this lesson know that pornography is wrong. What differentiates most students is the courage to stand up and choose God's standard over our desires.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, "What practical safeguards can we take to protect ourselves from pornography?"

# Commentary

## 1 THESSALONIANS 4:3

On his second missionary journey, Paul was directed by a vision from God to evangelize Macedonia, which was the northernmost province of ancient Greece. He first preached in Philippi, then traveled about 100 miles west to the city of Thessalonica (see Acts 17:1-9). A church was formed, but persecution forced Paul to flee. Later, in Corinth, he wrote 1 Thessalonians to address some errors in the church and to continue their instruction in basic doctrines.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, Paul addressed the need for Christians to be sexually pure. Paul boldly declared sanctification as indisputably God's will for every believer. *Sanctification* means to be made holy and is important in understanding the doctrine of salvation. *Justification* describes the immediate declaration of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior (Rom. 5:16-17). Sanctification points to the process of the Holy Spirit's moving a believer in Jesus Christ toward spiritual maturity.

In discussing the will of God many Christians focus on important life decisions regarding choices such as marriage, job opportunities, and education. Here, God's will refers to the revelation of truth found in God's Word regarding conduct. God is specific in revealing His will for the moral choices of His people. Seeking to do the will of God was the passion of Jesus' life in His earthly ministry (John 4:34) and should be ours as well.

Paul explained that part of God's will for believers' lives is to abstain from sexual immorality. Paul used the Greek noun translated as "sexual immorality" (*porneia*) to refer to any form of sexual conduct contrary to biblical teaching. The Bible teaches that God intended sexuality for a husband and wife in the covenant of marriage. While some Greek philosophical sects such as the Stoics urged sexual restraint, Gentile society in the first century A.D. was very permissive compared to biblical morality. Prostitution was common, including cultic prostitution at idolatrous places of worship. Writing from the notoriously wicked city of Corinth, Paul had ample opportunity to be reminded of Greek immorality. Paul would later describe the converts in Corinth as previously sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or anyone practicing homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9).

The Greek verb translated "abstain from" means to stay away from or avoid. Abstinence remains the only truly effective means of preventing unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and guilt. But we should remember that our command to abstain from sexual immorality involves more than just the sexual act. It involves all deviations from God's plan for sexuality—including pornography. Today, believers must see that to abstain from pornography is as radical as Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians to abstain from immorality in the first century.

**TIP:** Help students identify the sexual images, sexual dialogue, or sexual themes that may be present in their own lives currently. It is important that students see how this topic affects them everyday.

# STUDY THE BIBLE

*The Point: We should work to keep any sin from alienating us from God.*

<sup>4</sup>so that each of you knows how to control his own body in sanctification and honor, <sup>5</sup>not with lustful desires, like the Gentiles who don't know God.

—1 THESSALONIANS 4:4-5

## 1 THESSALONIANS 4:4-5

**GUIDE:** Lead students to understand the importance of self-discipline.

In verse 4, Paul wrote that everyone should learn how to control his own body—and desires; by doing so we can avoid *porneia*. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can learn to control our sexual urges. We are not victims of our sexual urges and impulses. We control our bodies “in sanctification and honor.” We should ask ourselves regularly: “Are my desires and actions holy and honorable?”

A major component of self-control is “pre-deciding.” As much as you seek to avoid sexual temptation and put up healthy guardrails in your life, sexual temptation will still cross your path. It is inevitable, but you cannot wait until the moment you are tempted to decide what your response will be. If you wait until you are in the moment of temptation, you will often make a poor decision. Commit to do what’s right before you’re tempted. Make the decision up front about what you will do—and not do—to avoid temptation.

Specifically, make pre-decisions about what you’ll watch, what you’ll read, where you’ll go, and with whom you’ll be alone. For example, part of controlling our bodies is controlling what we allow our eyes to see. And part of self-discipline is controlling what websites we visit and what channels we watch by controlling what buttons we allow our fingers to push on the remote control.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, “**What are some things that you have “pre-decided” not to do?**”

**SAY:** As Christ-followers, we ought to be distinguishable in our culture by the way we put up healthy and righteous guardrails to protect ourselves from falling into temptation.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, “**Why is the battleground of the mind so important?**”

**DO:** Invite students to complete the **Action Point**, “In Everything”

### **In Everything**

God’s standard for holiness is important even though it can be tough. How can you strive for holiness in the area of:

- ▶ Social Media
- ▶ The way you use your smart phone
- ▶ Your personal computer
- ▶ The movies and TV you watch

# Commentary

## 1 THESSALONIANS 4:4-5

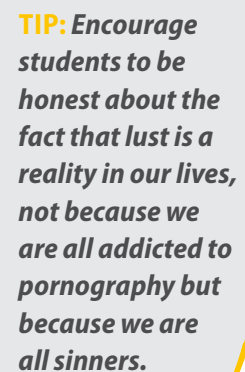
Commentators are divided over the proper meaning of the phrase “rendered to control his own body.” The King James Version translates it as “to possess his vessel.” The Greek noun literally means “thing” or “object.” Scholars have variously translated the word metaphorically to refer to one’s “body” or “wife.” The Greek verb literally means “to acquire.” It is also used in a metaphorical sense. If we adopt the meaning “wife” for “vessel,” the phrase encourages a husband to be faithful and satisfied with his wife. If we choose the translation “body,” the emphasis is upon the believer’s responsibility to control all sexual desires.

Paul urged believers to be self-controlled and to maintain sanctification and honor in their sexual conduct. We will deal with sanctification in verse 7, but we should take note of Paul’s use of honor to describe a spiritual position of obedience to God. The Greek noun refers to something or someone of value. God is worthy of the highest honor (1 Tim. 1:17). Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins is said to be precious (same root) blood (1 Pet. 1:19). For the Christian, the command to maintain honor in matters of sexuality implies holiness and a standard worthy of God’s calling. When we obey the Lord’s will, we are honorable and we give honor to Him.

Paul’s concern for the Christians in Thessalonica recognized the power of sexual urges and the addictive nature of sexually immoral practices. For us, such practices would include viewing pornography. Christians need to recognize these dangers and be able to practice self-control personally and help others who struggle with sexual sins. We must first realize that “self-control” is impossible apart from salvation and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul warned believers about the lustful desires that characterize those who don’t know God. Sexual immorality is a manifestation of the flesh or sinful nature of people who are sinners by nature and choice (Gal. 5:19). Self-control is possible only through faith in Christ and the filling of the Holy Spirit, which results in the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23). Paul warned believers who engaged in sexually immoral conduct that they were in those moments acting like unbelievers.

For those struggling with self-control, basic principles are found in God’s Word to help resist or recover from sexual temptations. First we should recognize the power of memorizing and meditating on God’s Word (Ps. 119:11). Second, we should give ourselves to regular times of prayer. Third, we should separate from sinful people and places where temptations are strong (1 Cor. 15:33). Finally, we should reach out to others for help whenever help is needed.



**TIP:** Encourage students to be honest about the fact that lust is a reality in our lives, not because we are all addicted to pornography but because we are all sinners.



## STUDY THE BIBLE

*The Point: We should work to keep any sin from alienating us from God.*

<sup>6</sup> This means one must not transgress against and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses, as we also previously told and warned you. <sup>7</sup> For God has not called us to impurity but to sanctification.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the person who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who also gives you His Holy Spirit.

—1 THESSALONIANS 4:6-8

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4:6-8

**SAY:** Whenever a person engages in sexual sin, it doesn't just impact him or her. The impact of sexual sin damages and affects those around us.

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read the following:

When we commit sexual sin, we end up wronging and taking advantage of everyone involved. Sexual sin never occurs with a nameless object. Pornography is more than “just images” because those images are of somebody who was created in the image of God and for whom Jesus died.

These verses contain a very strong, straightforward warning. When we engage in sexual sin like pornography:

- ▶ We invite God's judgment and discipline into our lives.
- ▶ We are living contrary to our new nature and calling as Christ-followers.
- ▶ We are rejecting God Himself.

Since these commands to sexual purity came directly from God, they are timeless. No matter how much culture shifts and changes, the call to sexual purity never changes.

This teaching can seem harsh and narrow-minded unless you understand why God would be so adamant about steering us away from sexual immorality. God is not anti-sex. He gives us strong prohibitions against porneia because He knows how He designed us. He knows that within marriage, sex is a wonderful gift of intimacy, pleasure, and love. But, when sex is experienced outside the bonds of marriage, it creates all kinds of problems and consequences. Because He loves us and wants to protect us, God has put up high fences for our sexual purity.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, “How does pornography damage someone's life?”



# Commentary

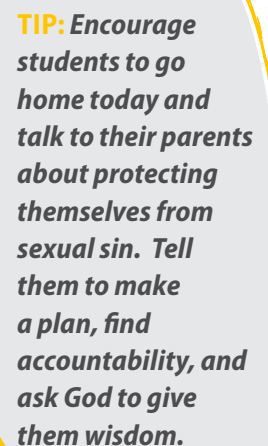
## 1 THESSALONIANS 4:6-8

Paul turned his attention to the impact of sexual immorality on others and God's response to immoral persons in judgment. Believers, not unbelievers, are the focus in these verses. Paul said that for a man to enter into a sexual relationship with another man's wife was to transgress against and defraud his brother in this matter. To take another's spouse violates the commandment to love our neighbor. For the spouse, adultery is treachery to one's mate; for the person who takes another's mate the sin is covetousness and theft. People often justify immoral behavior by claiming to be victims of a love they could not control. An unlawful desire, such as adultery, does not meet the biblical definition of love but rather should be labeled lust. Adultery is a sinful choice and God will hold us accountable.

Sexual immorality, like every other sin, always results in consequences—even for a believer. That's because the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses. The only other New Testament occurrence of the word translated "avenger" is in Romans 13:4, where Paul said government was "an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong." Violation of divine law regarding marriage or sexual purity will definitely have consequences. Paul broadened the warning beyond adultery with the phrase "the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses." Viewing pornography also has devastating consequences, both for the offenders and those around them.

Paul summed up his admonitions by stating that God has not called us to impurity but to sanctification. The Christian life is a call to spiritual transformation. God did not save us so we might continue our sinful ways. God saved us to make us holy as He is holy. The Christian life is intended to be a progression in putting to death the old person or sinful nature and living as new creatures in Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:17). The ultimate goal of sanctification is to think, speak, and act in all ways as Jesus. Remember, it was Jesus who stressed that sins of the mind, such as lust, were the equivalent to adultery in God's sight (see Matt. 5:28).

Paul anticipated some might think his view of sexuality was too strict. He warned that the person who rejects this does not reject man, but God. The definition of marriage and the boundaries of sexual morality are eternal. Those who disagree with these standards often attack the messengers such as Paul, but they are really rejecting God—the One who established and will judge on the basis of His law.



**TIP:** Encourage students to go home today and talk to their parents about protecting themselves from sexual sin. Tell them to make a plan, find accountability, and ask God to give them wisdom.

# IMPACT

(10 MINUTES)

## APPLY IT

**SAY:** No matter what your background or how long you have been a believer, all of us are vulnerable to sexual temptation and attack. Consider applying one of these action steps as a way to fight sexual temptation.

**READ:** Ask for a volunteer to read aloud a few ways students can take what they have learned and **Apply It**.

**TIP:** This can be an embarrassing and confrontational topic, so you may consider separating the guys and girls for the session. You'll likely have better and more open conversation if you do.

- ▶ **Develop some clear convictions.** You will never accidentally move into sexual purity. It takes a commitment to the truth that God's way is the best way.
- ▶ **Get accountable.** "Accountability" can be an intimidating word, but it is really nothing more than asking someone to help you keep your commitment to God. Meet regularly with someone or a small group that is open, safe, transparent, and supportive.
- ▶ **Help someone you know or yourself caught in the trap** of pornography get the resources they need to overcome this issue. They might need to get counseling, join a support group, or have a friend they can call when they feel tempted.

**GUIDE:** Lead students to consider which of the three suggested responses to the Bible study most closely applies to them and their current circumstances.

**ASK:** Which of these responses do you personally need to focus on most as you live this session out? Allow time for responses.

## WRAP UP

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, asking God to grant victory in your students' battle of the heart and mind against pornography and other sexual temptations.

**ASK:** Ask students about last week's **Live It Out** options. Discuss any responses and encourage students as they choose to apply the Bible to their lives.

**GUIDE:** Encourage students to complete one or both of the **Live It Out** activities for the week. Let them know you will discuss them next time you meet.



For **free online training** on how to lead a group visit  
**MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife**

# LEADER LIVE IT OUT

Before the session, challenge yourself to grow with your students through this Live It Out.

## Accountable | Job 31:1-4

Sometimes Internet accountability can be difficult. There are a lot of temptations out on the web. Consider having an Internet accountability partner. Write out a commitment to be accountable to each other. Ask your partner to sign it and hold you to it. Plan to meet together and talk about your Internet use regularly. Ask each other tough questions. Tell each other what sites you tend to visit most often. Commit to limit unnecessary time on the Internet. Ask each other where you spend most of your time. Confess any struggles you may be dealing with. Be honest with each other.

### I COMMIT TO...

NOTES:

# ONE CONVERSATION™

Use these discussion starters to help foster a spiritual conversation with your family.

**THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE:** Because of sin, culture has made sexuality an idol and condones sex based on opinions not grounded in biblical truth. Pornography—which is so readily accessible today—turns people into objects and cheapens God’s gift of sex. The battle of pornography must be fought in the mind and body. This is a daily battle where victory comes only by surrendering to the authority of Christ in every area of life. Jesus can heal the heart and mind and bring freedom to those trapped in this addiction.

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

## STUDENTS

**THE POINT:** We should work to keep any sin from alienating us from God.

- Talk to your student about pornography and the importance of protecting his/her mind.

Discuss the following quote: “Sexual images are inherently powerful and have emotional content. As such, pornography forces itself on the brain. Whether one consents or not, pornography becomes a part of the fabric of the mind.”<sup>1</sup>

—William M. Struthers

1. William M. Struthers, “The Effects of Porn on the Male Brain,” Christian Research Journal, volume 34, number 05 (2011), [cited 5 May 2014]. Available from the Internet: <http://www.equip.org>.

**LIVE IT OUT:** Your student has been encouraged to do one or both Live It Out activities in the Personal Study Guide. Here are some suggested ways to help your student:

*If your student chooses to do **Accountable**:*

- Encourage your student to have an Internet accountability partner.
- Talk to your student about precautions to put in place to protect him/her from harmful sites.

*If your student chooses to do **Media Fast**:*

- Encourage your students to complete the media fast for all seven days.
- Consider fasting with your student from all forms of media for seven days.