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Just Click

Christians, Porn, and the Lure of Cybersex

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Just ONE Click

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Grand Rapids, Michigan



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Just One Click: Christians, Porn, and the Lure of Cybersex. Originally published as *Behind Closed Doors: Christians, Pornography, and the Temptations of Cyberspace*. This revised edition is copublished by the Hope and Healing Institute and Faith Alive Christian Resources.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Baird, Robert J.

Just one click : Christians, porn, and the lure of cybersex / Robert J. Baird,
Ronald L. Vanderbeck. — [Rev. ed.].

p. cm.

Rev. ed. of: Behind closed doors.

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

ISBN 978-1-59255-514-7

1. Internet pornography—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Computer sex—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Vanderbeck, Ronald L. II. Baird, Robert J. Behind closed doors. III. Title.

BV4597.6.B35 2010

241'.66702854678—dc22

2010005020

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Preface

In an age when children and families are at risk of being affected by destructive forms of sexuality and the distortions of pornography, the Hope and Healing Institute is a nondenominational ministry committed to protection, healing, and renewal. The Institute provides an extensive range of services including crisis intervention, clinical counseling, psychological assessment, and forensic consultation. It is dedicated to bringing hope and healing to those who struggle with problems associated with pornography, cybersex, sexual abuse, incest, infidelity, or sexual addiction. The Institute is a sanctuary of solace and healing for those who have been victimized and a place where strugglers experience the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ.

The Institute has one fundamental goal: to unite the worldwide faith community to be more proactive in combating the proliferation of pornography and the exploitation of children, adolescents, and adults.

Please visit www.hopeandhealinginstitute.com for more information.

An Invitation to Renewal and Restoration

Tim's wife had only been gone for a minute or so. As usual he had given her a peck on the cheek, wished her a good day, and waved goodbye. He waited to boot up his computer until she had pulled out of the driveway. Ever since he'd gotten his new computer he looked forward to her leaving for work. It's not that he didn't love her; he truly did. But this was time for him to do something he wouldn't conceive of doing when she was at home. He closed the door to the den and removed last night's Bible study notes from his chair. It didn't take him long to get comfortable and find his favorite sites. He was so immersed in what he was doing that he never heard the door open. His heartbroken wife stood speechless.

John graduated toward the top of his class in law school and was quickly recruited by a prestigious firm. With a private office, a personal secretary, and law clerks to assist him, he had all the resources to be a successful attorney. He always arrived early and was one of the last to leave. So the senior partners could not understand why his billings were so low.

But John wasn't working on briefs when he was behind the closed doors of his office.

Kate considered herself a typical soccer mom. Her husband had a good paying job so she didn't have to work. She carted her three kids around to school and sporting events. By all appearances she seemed to have the perfect life. Nice husband. Great kids. Big house. But Kate was bored. Her husband spent so many hours at work that she didn't feel her needs were being met. So Kate turned to Internet chatrooms. She wasn't looking primarily for sex. What she craved was affirmation and affection. There she found the attention she sought.

Stephen was a sophomore in high school. His parents took him to see a psychologist who specializes in adolescent depression. Stephen had all the telltale signs of depression: he was sleeping through all of his classes at school; he was no longer hanging out with his friends; he used to be an avid soccer player, but not any more. Clinically speaking, he was depressed. But what his parents didn't know was that after they went to bed at night, Stephen would quietly boot up his computer and surf through porn sites till the wee hours of the morning.

Jill was in middle school—eighth grade, to be exact. When her parents came to the offices of The Hope and Healing Institute, both of their faces were ashen. Her father's hands trembled as he described the pictures they'd found on their daughter's digital camera—pictures of Jill and her boyfriend. They had met in their church's youth group. What should have been a story of puppy love instead escalated into a story of coercion. The boyfriend had introduced Jill to the world of "virtual" reality, where reality quickly becomes distorted. Jill truly believed that what she encountered there represented normal relationships. She had nothing to base her conclusion on, since sex was never openly discussed in her home.

If any of these stories sounds familiar to you, it's not surprising. Statistics show that one in five Americans uses the Internet to look for pornography or engage in cybersexual "chat." In fact, sex is the most frequently searched topic on the Internet—more than games, music, travel, jokes, cars, jobs, weather, and health material combined.¹ In a recent survey, one in ten people reported believing he or she was addicted to sex via the Internet. Moreover, one in four disclosed feeling that on at least one occasion his or her online sexual behavior was out of control.²

A survey conducted by Focus on the Family with Zogby International indicates that one out of five American adults may have looked for sex on the Internet. Twenty percent of the respondents admitted to having visited a sexually oriented website (representing approximately 40 million adults). Nearly 26 percent of men and 17 percent of women indicated that it was either somewhat or very likely that the Internet is capable of providing sexual fulfillment. Not sexual stimulation; sexual fulfillment.³

Rabbit Hunting and the Proliferation of Porn

In 1953 an event took place that would forever change the moral complexion of American society: the publication of *Playboy* magazine. With his bunny insignia and Playboy Playmates, Hugh Hefner introduced pornography into mainstream American culture. What had earlier been shunned or ridiculed was soon to become not only tolerated but also celebrated. Prior to *Playboy*, the public perception was that users of porn were perverted or twisted. Hefner, however, marketed his material in such a way that his readers could consider themselves sophisticated, intelligent, and debonair. In a very real way, pornography became fashionable. No longer hidden in back alleys, pornography was readily available at newsstands and delivered by the United States Postal Service.

The popularity of Hefner's product was enormous, and for nearly fifteen years Playboy Enterprises monopolized the market. Then, in 1969, an advertisement appeared in the *New York Times*. It featured the *Playboy* bunny logo centered in a rifle sight, accompanied by the caption "We're going rabbit hunting." The ad went on to read, "If you can catch a rabbit once, you can catch him again. That's what we did in Germany and France. The United States market will be the next to fall. We are going to catch this rabbit in his own backyard. We are the magazine that gives men what they are looking for."

And so began the pornography wars. *Penthouse* declared a full offensive in an attempt to dominate the market. In 1974 Larry Flynt joined the fray, launching *Hustler* magazine. As these publishers pressed to achieve a larger share of the market, they pushed the envelope of acceptability. In a short period of time, the images depicted in these magazines changed from erotica to full frontal nudity. Over the next twenty years, the content of these publications included ever increasingly hardcore depictions of sex.

The technology of the 1970s and 1980s then catapulted pornography into a multibillion-dollar industry. Cable and satellite TV permitted viewers to access pornography from the privacy of their homes. No longer did users risk being seen purchasing a dirty magazine. Behind closed doors, Americans were beginning to do in private what they never would have considered doing in public.

The introduction of VHS tapes and inexpensive videocassette players magnified the problem. In 1978, one hundred hardcore films were released. In 1996, that number climbed to 8,000. In 2002, over 11,000 hardcore films were released, compared with 470 Hollywood features. Hardcore video rentals increased from \$75 million annually in 1985 to \$490 million in 1992, and to \$665 million in 1996.⁴ What

happened next, though, makes these statistics seem minuscule by comparison.

The introduction of the Internet in the 1990s granted anyone with a personal computer and Internet connection access to pornography twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. With little to no restrictions, people of all ages now have access to a vast smorgasbord of smut. All it takes is the click of a mouse to view all sorts of images, from the erotic and titillating to the downright bizarre.

An Invitation to Renewal and Restoration

No question about it, an astonishing number of people within the faith community struggle with sexual sin on the Internet. And it is for them, their spouses, and others who want to help them that this book is written. This book, however, is not just about calling attention to a problem. It is about solutions. With inspiration from Scripture and insight from the behavioral sciences, the book presents specific and practical interventions to assist those struggling with sexual sin stemming from the Internet.

The purpose of this book is to liberate people from sexual sin, not only by educating them to the risks and destructive power of cybersexual behavior, but also by providing the tools and strategies essential for life-changing renewal and transformation.

The format of this book is essentially the same for each chapter. Beginning with personal stories based on the experiences of those who sought treatment at the Hope and Healing Institute, each chapter then provides an analysis of the situation as well as encouraging biblical references intended to inspire hope. Most important, readers will find practical strategies designed to help renew and restore a healthy, Christian sexuality. Questions for Reflection and Discussion at the end of each chapter are designed to be used in

The Reality of Internet Pornography

- According to the Internet Filter Review, worldwide pornography revenue in 2006 was \$97.06 billion. They estimate that there are 4.2 million pornographic websites, 420 million pornographic web pages, and 68 million daily pornographic search engine requests.
- According to Media Metrix, Internet users view over 15 billion pages of adult content in a single month.
- Child pornography is one of the fastest-growing businesses online, and the content is becoming worse. In 2004, the Internet Watch Foundation found 3,433 child abuse domains; in 2006, they identified 10,656 child abuse domains.
- Worldwide revenue from mobile phone pornography is expected to rise to \$1 billion and could grow to three times that number or more within a few years.
- In research conducted by the Polly Klaas Foundation, almost one in eight youth ages eight to eighteen discovered that someone they were communicating with online was an adult pretending to be much younger.
- Forty-two percent of Internet users aged ten to seventeen had seen online pornography in a recent twelve-month span. Of those, 66 percent said they did not want to view the images and had not sought them out.
- Sex is the number-one searched-for topic on the Internet.
- Sixty percent of all website visits are sexual in nature.
- According to *Today's Christian Woman*, one out of every six women, including Christians, struggles with pornography.
- Fifty-one percent of pastors say cyberporn is a possible temptation. Thirty-seven percent say it is a current struggle. Four in ten pastors have visited a porn site.

—Data provided by Enough Is Enough⁵

a small group setting and allow participants to share their own observations, experiences, and insights as they respond together to the material they've read.

Our hope is that you will discover that the solution to recovery is a renewed relationship with God. Throughout these chapters may Christ's gentle call inspire changed thoughts and behaviors and a new way of living.

Sexual struggles are not new. The Bible narrative shows that humanity has struggled with sexual issues throughout the ages. Joseph encountered sexual temptation when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him (Gen. 39:7-19). Sexual gluttony contributed to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16-33). Lot and his two daughters had an incestuous relationship (Gen. 19:30-38). Abraham believed his wife was incapable of conceiving a child, so he chose to have an adulterous relationship with Hagar (Gen. 16:1-16). Believing she was a prostitute, Judah slept with his daughter-in-law (Gen. 38). Sexual manipulation is implied in the story of Samson and Delilah (Judg. 16). King David abused his power in order to have an adulterous affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11-12). David's third son, Absalom, rebelled against his father and had sexual relations with all of his father's wives (2 Sam. 16:21-22).

Warnings against adultery are specified in Proverbs 6:20-29, and the destructiveness of adultery is portrayed in the metaphor of Jerusalem as an adulterous wife (Ezek. 16). In his letter to the church in Rome, the apostle Paul addresses the multiplicity of ways in which people rebel against a covenant relationship with God, including sexual immorality. Similar admonitions appear in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, one of the largest seaports in the Roman Empire and a city renowned for sexual excesses and immorality. Paul insists that such practices not be tolerated in the church (1 Cor. 5).

The Bible is a book about relationships: about people's relationship with God and with each other. It tells authentic stories of real people, in all their complexity. Like us, our biblical ancestors struggled with temptation. Like us, surrounded by a secular, sexualized culture, they made bad choices.

But the stories in the Bible are also stories about redemption. And so are the stories you are about to read in this book. These are stories of real people from the faith community who have experienced the dark, chaotic forces of cyberspace. As clients who sought treatment at the Hope and Healing Institute, they have agreed to share their stories. Only names and other identifying information have been changed to protect their privacy.

One of their stories may be your story. Our prayer is that, by the grace of God, you too will accept God's invitation to renewal and restoration.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do you think online pornography is any more tempting or worse than the "dirty" magazines and pictures people used to use? If so, in what way?
2. How has online pornography affected your life or the life of someone you know and love?
3. What insights does Scripture have for those who are struggling to overcome addiction to pornography and for their families and friends?