



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection
Center for Christian Ethics
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Study Guides for

The Pornographic Culture

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to help us engage our pornographic culture with Christ-transformed minds. The guides can be used in a series or individually. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

- Naked and Not Ashamed** 2
This naked couple, Adam and Eve, living, even cavorting, in Eden is not the stuff of children's Bibles. Yet it forms the necessary beginning for grasping the unblushing approach to human sexuality in Scripture.
- Sex and the City of God** 4
The biblical limitations regarding appropriate sexual behavior result from an awareness of the raw power of sex. Individuals now, like then, are involved in consensual sexual relationships that fall short of God's intention. Yet there is hope for our fallen sexual desires if we allow them to be rightly ordered by God.
- Simpletons, Fools, and Mockers** 6
In three characters delineated in Proverbs we can see an ancient account of the descent into the folly of pornography in our times. Yet biblical wisdom offers hope for redemption, and wisdom incarnate in Jesus Christ extends that hope even further.
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How can we understand the powerful lure of sexual imagery that captivates us? If the obsession with the pornographic image is a sickness, it is a sickness of will for which we are, to some significant degree, responsible.
- Erotic, But Not Pornographic** 10
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- Avoiding Pornography's Mess** 12
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Focus Article:

📖 Sex and the City (of God)
(The Pornographic Culture, pp. 9-16)

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Naked and Not Ashamed

This naked couple, Adam and Eve, living, even cavorting, in Eden is not the stuff of children's Bibles. Yet it forms the necessary beginning for grasping the unblushing approach to human sexuality in Scripture.

Prayer

Scripture Readings: Genesis 2:18-25, 3:1-13, 16-21

Responsive Reading†

This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made him in the likeness of God.

Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them "Humankind" when they were created.

Reflection

Human sexuality, in its created order, expresses the image of God. "So God created humankind in his own image," Genesis 1:27 says, "in the image of God he created *him*; male and female he created *them*" (emphasis added). The pronouns shift between the singular and the plural to show that God creates only one humanity, yet in two distinct sexual persons, the male and female. Their unity in humanness does not undo their distinctness as persons, and their distinctness does not compromise their essential unity. Mutuality and relationship, rather than independence, have been essential to human beings from the very beginning.

From a Christian perspective, Lake suggests, we see that "the eternal love relationship among the persons of the Godhead is given its fullest earthly expression in the self-giving love between a man and a woman for a lifetime." As Christians we share "an embodied faith" that allows us to see in sexual union a rich metaphor to describe the human relationship to God:

- ▶ The erotic imagery of the Song of Songs has been applied to the relationship between Christ and the Church. Furthermore, Paul takes up the imagery of Israel as wife and God as husband, which is frequent in the Old Testament, and adapts it to Christ and the Church in Ephesians 5. "The passion, the love, and the oneness exhibited by marriage point in the direction of the ultimate consummation of the marriage supper of the Lamb," Lake writes.
- ▶ Christian mystics in the medieval era wrote in graphic sexual imagery, borrowed from faithful married life, to make clear the soul's intimacy with God. Such borrowing has precedent in the Bible: the same Hebrew word, *yada*, which means carnal knowledge, or sexual intercourse (as in Genesis 4:1), is used for God *knowing* the deepest secrets of our hearts (Psalm 44:21) and in the gracious invitation for us to *know* God (Psalm 46:10). "To fully know any person—including God—is never merely a cognitive experience," Lake says. "To know a person is to be passionately involved with them." This close connection between sexual intimacy and intimacy with God may be behind Paul's instruction to married couples not to refrain



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from sexual relations “except to devote yourselves to prayer” (1 Corinthians 7:5).

The story of Adam and Eve not only expresses the underlying goodness of human sexuality, but also reminds us that our sexuality has gone awry due to the fall into sin. Though our sexuality is no more corrupted than other human desires, “by its very centrality to the nature of being human,” Lake observes, “corrupted sexuality has consequences that can be much more far-reaching than those of other aspects of our fallenness.” For instance, in the garden in Eden the woman is not subservient to the man, but is created to be a “helper as his partner” (2:20). (Elsewhere in the Old Testament, *‘ezer*, the Hebrew word for “helper,” can describe God’s caring relationship toward human beings. It is not a demeaning word.) Sin, however, brings male domination of women, which is not part of God’s original intention. The curse pronounced on Eve for her disobedience to God (3:16) is that “even the domination of women by men unleashed by sin will not be sufficient to cool the desire of women for men.”

We must remember that in everything following Genesis 3, human sexuality is a mixture of God’s good design and our sinful effacement of that design. Yet the good news is that our Creator is at work to redeem the fallen creation; God desires to rightly order our sexuality so that we might live as God designed us to live.

Study Questions

1. “Shame can be defined simply as the feeling we have when we evaluate our actions, feelings, or behavior, and conclude that we have done wrong,” writes psychiatrist Michael Lewis. “It encompasses the whole of ourselves; it generates a wish to hide, to disappear, or even to die” (*Shame: the Exposed Self*, p. 2). How do you respond to Lewis’ definition?
2. Is human sexuality shameful in the Eden story? How does shame enter the picture? How does God respond to the man and woman’s shame?
3. The woman is created to be the man’s “helper as his partner” in the garden in Eden (Genesis 2:20). Lake reminds us that in the Old Testament, *‘ezer*, the Hebrew word for “helper,” usually describes God’s caring for human beings. Look at the representative uses of *‘ezer* in Psalms 115 and 121. With these as background, how would you interpret the woman’s relationship to the man *before* the fall into sin?
4. Is erotic imagery an appropriate metaphor for our relationship to God? What are the dangers in using such imagery today? What would be the advantages?
5. How does the hymn “Be Thou My Vision” (p. 49) capture some of the complexities of Genesis 3:8-9?

Departing Hymn: “Be Thou My Vision” (verses 1, 2a, 4b, and 5)

† Genesis 5:1-2 (NRSV).



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Focus Article:

📖 Sex and the City (of God)
(The Pornographic Culture, pp. 9-16)

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Sex and the City of God

The biblical limitations regarding appropriate sexual behavior result from an awareness of the raw power of sex. Individuals now, like then, are involved in consensual sexual relationships that fall short of God's intention. Yet there is hope for our fallen sexual desires if we allow them to be rightly ordered by God.

Prayer

Loving God, may we, as a family of faith and the household of God, learn to strengthen marriages, celebrate fidelity in singleness, and strive together to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to you. For we ask it in the name of your Son our Lord, who both celebrated the wedding at Cana and lived in singleness during his time on earth. Amen.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:13b-20

Reflection

In his Corinthian letters the Apostle Paul writes about a wide range of sexual practices. This church was so confused: it tolerated one member's gross sexual immorality "of a kind that is not found even among pagans" (1 Corinthians 5:1), yet other members wrote letters urging that Christians should avoid sexual intercourse completely (7:1). What place should sex have in the "new creation" of which these Christians had become a part?

Apparently the Corinthians did not take sexual sin seriously because they mistakenly believed (a) what they did with their bodies would not harm them spiritually, and (b) if they did condemn any member's sex life, they would show spiritual immaturity. Paul strongly rebukes them, saying that people who give free reign to disordered sexuality will have no place in God's kingdom. But then he adds the good news, "And this is what some of you used to be. 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" (6:9-11). "God is ready to rightly order our sexuality," Lake says, "if we are willing to acknowledge that it, like all aspects of our life, is in need of healing."

Husbands and wives becoming "one flesh" in sexual union both expresses and calls out the spiritual, emotional, and volitional union God intends for their marriage. "The limitations regarding appropriate sexual behavior," Lake writes, "result from a biblical awareness of the raw power of sex—whether used in licit or illicit ways." Thus Paul denounces visits to prostitutes because, regardless of how fleeting their encounter, sex forges an intimate union between the participants (6:15-16). "Your *body* is a temple of the Holy Ghost," he warns some startled Corinthians, who believed their true selves were unchanged by their sexual misbehavior.

Perhaps the other group of Corinthian Christians, who avoided sexual intercourse, believed that their self and body were distinct in another way: that they lived on a spiritual plane 'above' their bodies. Or perhaps they were abstaining from sex because they expected an early return of Christ. To them Paul gives nuanced guidance in chapter 7:



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▶ The sexual relationship, not feelings of love, is the unique bond between husband and wife, and in their sexuality they belong equally to one another. In this instruction, Lake observes, “The goodness of marital sex is not contingent on the production of children.” Neither husband nor wife should deny the other, unless they agree to forgo sexual activity for a short time for prayer (7:2-5).

▶ As beautiful and important as human sexuality is, an active sex life is not necessary for human happiness, but only for the establishment of a marriage. Paul considers his own singleness to be a gift from God, allowing him to serve God and others with undivided devotion (7:7-8, 32-35). “Jesus was born into a world where to be a rabbi or a Roman senator, one had to be married. But Christ demonstrated that one could be a fully integrated human being without benefit of sexual relations,” notes Lake.

Sexual intimacy is not the goal of human life. Its pleasure points beyond itself to the intimate enjoyment of God for which we were created. This supreme joy is available to all people. “In the kingdom of God, the promise is not that all the single people will finally get married, but that all will participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb of God. Jesus says that in heaven ‘they neither marry nor are given in marriage’ (Matthew 22:30), not because marriage is unimportant, but because it is pointing to something beyond itself. Once the true Bridegroom arrives, the ultimate fulfillment of all earthly longing will begin.”

Study Questions:

1. How does the Bible celebrate the goodness and joy of human sexuality without making it essential to our happiness?
2. “The Bible does not only condemn exploitative sexual behaviors,” Lake writes. How, for Paul, are some non-exploitative, consensual sexual behaviors contrary to God’s intention?
3. In 1 Corinthians 7:3-4, Lake notes, “the woman ... is a sexually active partner.” Discuss the quotation from Theodoret of Cyrus (*The Pornographic Culture*, p. 59) concerning the radical equality of Paul’s instruction here to husbands and wives.

Departing Hymn: “Sacred the Body”



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Focus Article:

📖 Simpletons, Fools, and Mockers
(*The Pornographic Culture*, pp. 24-30)

Suggested Article:

📖 Body Worship
(*The Pornographic Culture*, pp. 66-69)

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Simpletons, Fools, and Mockers

In three characters delineated in Proverbs we can see an ancient account of the descent into the folly of pornography in our times. Yet biblical wisdom offers hope for redemption, and wisdom incarnate in Jesus Christ extends that hope even further.

Prayer†

My soul's desire is to see the face of God,
and to rest in his house.
My soul's desire is to study the Scriptures,
and to learn the ways of God.
My soul's desire is to be freed from all fear and sadness,
and to share Christ's risen life.
My soul's desire is to imitate my King,
and to sing his praises always.
My soul's desire is to enter the gates of heaven,
and to gaze upon the light that shines forever.
Dear Lord, you alone know what my soul truly desires,
and you alone can satisfy those desires. Amen.

Scripture Readings: Proverbs 9:1-6, 9-10, and 13-18

Reflection

Wisdom is personified in Proverbs 9 as the hostess of a delicious banquet of home-baked bread and the finest wine. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom," teach the ancient Israelite sages, "and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." Folly is the very opposite of this godly wisdom which the ancient teachers commend. She is a lazy pretender, offering us only "stolen" water and bread. A great many proverbs warn of the allure and threat of folly, for it is far more devastating than mere childishness or silliness. "Folly," in the biblical wisdom tradition, is one name for all that destroys life.

Folly appears in many forms in Proverbs, including slander (10:18), drunkenness and gluttony (23:20), laziness (26:15), and greed for riches (28:22, 25). Pornography is a contemporary form of folly, Wilson suggests, that runs rampant in our culture.

Proverbs often makes its teaching vivid and concrete through the use of characters. In the three characters of the simple, the fool, and the mocker, we see an ancient accounting of a person's descent into folly:

- ▶ The *simple* lack sense (7:7), are naïve (14:15), and do not perceive the consequences of their actions (22:3). The simple are not wicked and have not rejected the way of wisdom, but their lack of judgment, if not corrected, will lead them into waywardness and eventually destruction (1:32).
- ▶ The *fool* delights in ignorance (1:7, 22), scorns the advice of others (15:5; 23:9), trusts his own insight (18:2; 28:26), and lacks self-control (14:16). The fool is seduced by folly, and thus develops a taste for the counterfeit pleasures of the way of death. The fool cultivates ignorance and plans evil.
- ▶ The *mocker* (NIV), or scoffer (NRSV), embraces folly as a pattern for living. Mockers delight in pride and arrogance



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(21:24) and praise the folly of others. They are committed to drawing others into the way of death, all the time mocking those who bear witness to wisdom, the way of life (9:7-8).

"This, then, is the history of sin as it is embodied in the way of folly," summarizes Wilson. "The simple one, who has a bent toward folly, follows that natural bent. He becomes a fool whose heart is set on folly, whose purpose and energy is directed toward folly. The fool becomes the mocker who calls what is good, 'evil,' and what is evil, he calls 'good.' He perceives death as life and mocks those in the way of wisdom as those who don't know how to live."

Do we not see this same pattern of descent into the folly of pornography today? A simple one naïvely "browses" the internet or "surfs" late night cable channels to see what's "out there." A fool downloads images onto a computer or stashes pornographic magazines in the nightstand. Then a mocker promotes these deadly pleasures as "the way to enjoy life."

Pornography's spiritually deadly folly permeates our culture in other subtle ways. The Dardens suggest that when men and women, husbands and wives, and even parents of teenage girls endorse cosmetic silicone breast implants, they succumb to its folly. They voluntarily mutilate the female body in order to attain an idealized, narrowed version of feminine beauty.

Proverbs holds hope of redemption from Folly's deadly traps for the simple, since teachers can direct them toward the path of life. It holds little hope for the fool, and even less for the mocker, for they have closed their ears to instruction. However, even fools and mockers can be "born again," not in the facile sense of popular culture, but in the death-denying, life-giving power of the incarnate wisdom of God.

Study Questions

1. How are Wisdom and Folly personified in Proverbs 9? How are their competing allures portrayed?
2. "How do the simple learn wisdom?" Wilson wonders (p. 30). Where does learning wisdom begin? What role do parents and elders play in this educational process?
3. "We have fallen prey to a cult that worships a false idol," the Dardens write. "The female breast is a wonderful thing. The worship of it in the popular culture is idolatry" (*The Pornographic Culture*, p. 67). Does this artificial sense of female beauty and culturally-mandated desirability reflect our culture's descent into the folly of pornography? How can we reorient our attitudes about beauty and desirability?
4. What might be a simple (or naïve) person's attitude toward cosmetic silicone breast implants? How might fools respond? Or mockers?

Departing Hymn: "My Jesus, I Love Thee" (Verses 1, 2, 4)

† Robert van de Weyer, *Celtic Prayers*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), p. 38. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



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Focus Article:

📖 Habit's Harsh Bondage
(*The Pornographic Culture*,
pp. 31-37)

Suggested Article:

📖 Sexual Authenticity and
Character
(*The Pornographic Culture*,
pp. 83-87)

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Habit's Harsh Bondage

How can we understand the powerful lure of sexual imagery that captivates us? If the obsession with the pornographic image is a sickness, it is a sickness of will for which we are, to some significant degree, responsible.

Prayer†

**O God, I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.**

Listen to the words of Jesus: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone. Has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and from now on do not sin again."

Amen.

Scripture Reading: Romans 7:14-25

Reflection

"Wretched man that I am!" shouts Paul, calling out like a slave, seeking rescue. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

Anyone who's been captivated by pornography's images has experienced what Paul describes. How do these images become an obsession? To what extent are we responsible for falling under their power? Augustine provides subtle insight into "habit's harsh bondage." As we make choices, our choices begin to modify what we desire, how we think, and what gives us pleasure; our choices gradually shape habits, which change who we are.

Mysteriously, our desires are distorted by the whole trend of choices that human beings have made. (This is the doctrine of the fall into sin. "Man has called for anarchy: God lets him have it," C. S. Lewis writes.) All of our desires are malfunctioning, but our sexual desires clearly exhibit this disorder. "With great frequency, reason tilts in one direction while sexual desire tugs in another," Kennedy notes. "Thus, we turn to gaze when we think we shouldn't; we find erotic and sexually stimulating things we believe we ought not to find pleasurable at all. We discover that sexual arousal often escapes our control; at times we are unable to function sexually when we want to; at other times we find ourselves sexually aroused when we would rather not be."

"The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16, NASB) become irresistible. "Perhaps it is most helpful ... to view these three—the lusts of the flesh and the eyes and the pride of life—not as three distinct temptations, but as one temptation, powerfully drawing individuals into the clutches of pornography," Kennedy suggests. "To be sure, the lust of the flesh is the guiding desire, but pornography satisfies the flesh by means of the eye, and then, with the assistance of the proud and misguided confidence that we can handle things by ourselves, habits that enslave us are formed."



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Augustine found release from his bondage to habit only in God's severe grace. As slaves, we cannot free ourselves. Note the irony: if self-control is what we lack, then we cannot self-medicate ourselves with willpower. J. Heinrich Arnold has observed that if we struggle to "will away" sinful thoughts about or desires for pornographic material, we actually bring those thoughts and desires into sharper mental focus. Consequently, we feel that we are powerless and our liberation is out of reach. Should we be disappointed, then, at his advice to give up the struggle? "Arnold is wise to steer us away from misguided 'self-help' schemes, to point us away from 'struggle' models and toward 'surrender,'" Hadaway suggests. "This is an essential first reflective step on the long road towards liberation from sinful habits of thought that bind us."

Study Questions

1. Consider Kennedy's example of pornography's seduction. It begins, "So it is with us. The visual temptation might start with a billboard ad, a magazine cover, a movie scene, or a webpage" (*The Pornographic Culture*, pp. 35-36). How does this illustrate Augustine's account of the harsh bondage of habit?
2. "The lust of the eyes," according to Augustine, is a "type of curiosity, a 'vain inquisitiveness' into the look of things, and an intense desire merely to see something provocative or shocking. This desire, which is rarely satisfied, is fueled by the promise of new and ever more stimulating views." How does pornography exploit this sort of curiosity?
3. Discuss John Michael Talbot's observation in "Other Voices" (*The Pornographic Culture*, p. 58) that begins, "We are what we think. This is why we should never underestimate what we allow to enter our minds."
4. Should we consider obsession with pornographic images to be a sickness?

Departing Hymn: "Take Thou Our Minds, Dear Lord" (verses 1, 3, and 4)

Take Thou our minds, dear Lord, we humbly pray,
give us the mind of Christ each passing day;
teach us to know the truth that sets us free;
grant us in all our thoughts to honor Thee.

Take Thou our wills, Most High! Hold Thou full sway;
have in our inmost souls Thy perfect way;
guard Thou each sacred hour from selfish ease;
guide Thou our ordered lives as Thou dost please.

Take Thou ourselves, O Lord, heart, mind, and will;
through our surrendered souls Thy plans fulfill.
We yield ourselves to Thee—time, talents, all;
we hear, and henceforth heed, Thy sovereign call.

William H. Foulkes (1918)

Suggested tunes: BREAD OF LIFE or ELLERS

† Adapted from Psalm 51 and John 8:7-11 (NRSV).



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Focus Article:

- 📖 Erotic, but not
Pornographic
(*The Pornographic Culture*,
pp. 70-76)

Suggested Articles:

- 📖 Song Sung Blue?
(*The Pornographic Culture*,
pp. 61-65)
- 📖 Reeducating Our Desires
(*The Pornographic Culture*,
pp. 77-82)

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Erotic, but not Pornographic

Can we produce distinctively Christian art that is really true to the biblical vision of sexual love? Our generation desperately needs that vision. Christian art, for those who will receive it, can be redemptive, rescuing their imagination from the limitations of creatureliness and sin.

Prayer†

Responsive Reading†

My beloved speaks and says to me:

“Arise my love, my fair one,
and come away;

for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.

Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.”

**I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:**

**do not stir up or awaken love
until it is ready!**

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;

for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.

Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.

Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.

If one offered for love all the wealth of one’s house,
it would be utterly scorned.

**I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:**

**do not stir up or awaken love
until it is ready!**

Scripture Reading: Song of Songs 4:1-7 and 5:8-16

Reflection

Song of Songs captures the sensuality of sexual love through startlingly frank erotic imagery. As it extols the power and passion of sexual love, the Song weaves its storytelling within the bounds of virtuous love, a commitment to relationship, and a deep respect for mutuality between lovers. Song of Songs is erotic, but not pornographic.

What distinguishes erotic art from pornographic material? “Any Christian erotic art,” notes Peck, “will focus on the relationship between the persons, rather than on the physical experience.” Song of Songs exemplifies this aesthetic; it overflows with carefully crafted expressions of adoration between the lover and the beloved. They sing back and forth the many praises of how they enchant one another. They revel in one another’s physical beauty and attractiveness, though they cherish far more than their partner’s body. The lovers are altogether



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pleased with one another, with the sound of their voices, the smell of their skin, the taste of their mouths, and even with the strength of their character! The latter is a distant cry from what pornography peddles as a sexual relationship.

Pornography, on the other hand, is voyeuristic: it encourages the viewer's self-arousal while eliminating the inconvenient necessity of dealing with another human being. Further, it "tends to rely on digitally-enhanced images of surgically-enhanced bodies," Singleton comments. This standardized artificiality dampens appreciation for the variety of real bodies.

When toned-down versions of pornographic material go mainstream with consumer marketing—think of popular newsstand magazines or prime-time television commercials—their sexual imagery can powerfully and subtly inform our desires. "Our desires should lead us toward the true, the good, and the beautiful that are found in God," writes Dolan-Henderson, "pornography redirects [our desires] toward a fantasy life that refuses all limits."

We can resist pornography's grossly perverted presentations of sexuality and human bodies by putting forward an alternative vision informed by a biblical understanding of sex, exemplified in the Song of Songs. This vision will emphasize the value of all persons, both male and female. It will point to ideals of restraint and chastity, acknowledge the genuine struggle between desire and virtue, and emphasize the seriously intimate nature of the sexual bond.

What the Church and our culture desperately need are writers, artists, filmmakers, musicians, and teachers who invite us to discover for ourselves the distinctively Christian worldview, including its ideal for sexual relationships.

Study Questions

1. What standards for evaluating erotic material are drawn by Singleton from Song of Songs? How well do her standards help us to distinguish erotic art from pornographic material?
2. According to Peck, how is Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) a model work of storytelling (*The Pornographic Culture*, pp. 72-73)? When we study its form and technique, what do we learn that will help us to create and evaluate Christian art?
3. Peck describes a life-size, charcoal drawing that was exhibited at the Tate Gallery in London. Why does he think the drawing of this couple is erotic but not pornographic?
4. Discuss Wendell Berry's comments in "Other Voices" (*The Pornographic Culture*, pp. 58-60). What does the mere voyeur necessarily fail to see? What would the best artistic representations of sexual lovemaking acknowledge?

Departing Hymn: "Sacred the Body"

† Adapted from Song of Songs 2:10-13; 3:5, 8:6-7 (NRSV).



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Focus Articles:

- 📖 Turning Dimes into Dollars
(The Pornographic Culture, pp. 17-23)
- 📖 Avoiding the Mess in Mass Media
(The Pornographic Culture, pp. 88-92)

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Avoiding Pornography's Mess

With demanding consumers, willing producers, and savvy business executives, the pornography industry has become diverse and pervasive in North America. How can adults and parents discern the commendable while screening out the objectionable in our popular culture?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 6:3-10

Responsive Reading†

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the god of peace will be with you.

Reflection

Why is pornography increasingly diverse and pervasive in our culture? Part of the answer, of course, lies in the desires of its consumers and proclivities of its high-profile producers. Martinez turns our attention to the business side of the industry and startles us with other reasons for pornography's influence.

- ▶ *The demand for pornography is 'inelastic.'* Since its consumers want immediate gratification, they are relatively insensitive to changes in price. Consequently, retail markups on pornographic products are fairly high, with sales totaling more than \$10-12 billion in 2000.
- ▶ *Pornography increasingly is accepted as a legitimate industry.* Lax social standards of decency, coordinated lobbying efforts, well-attended conferences and conventions, and the participation of large, mainstream corporations in its distribution are major factors in its increased legitimacy. "The gap between outright pornography and the sexual content permeating mainstream media productions has narrowed considerably as entertainment providers sense their viewers' increasing appetite, or demand, for nudity and explicit material," Martinez observes. Large corporations like Yahoo, AT&T, and General Motors have lent their expertise to its distribution.
- ▶ *The pornography industry's sophisticated business model increases profits and attracts business allies.* Well-educated business graduates have created a network model similar to that of Hollywood, using leading edge VCR and Internet technologies and increased marketing of the industry's "stars."

"As the industry's profits continue to grow, it is likely that its lobbying efforts will seek out and find new political and cultural allies. The quest for the legitimacy that is the most important source of sustenance for any industry will then be complete for



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

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pornography,” Martinez warns. “Its toxic mess of distorted desire ... increasingly will seep through to other businesses such as hotels, mainstream publishing, television networks, entertainment venues, and the Internet.”

As pornography continues to gain legitimacy, reap huge profits, and shape popular culture’s guiding values, we must become more discriminating consumers of contemporary entertainment. Carl Hoover directs us to Internet resources that help us to discern the commendable and praiseworthy in popular movies, television programs, music, and video games. *Rating systems* provide an initial, general level of screening. “Ratings can be too generic for parents and adults looking for specific guidance,” Hoover laments. “Furthermore, most ratings systems evaluate only levels of sex, violence, and profanity. They rarely address moral issues of lying, greed, self-centeredness, excessive consumerism, or prejudice.” He recommends timely *reviews*, whether the judgment of friends or of media critics, for a more detailed account of an entertainment’s content and value.

These resources can help us practice Jesus’ admonition to “be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

Study Questions

1. What aspect of the pornography’s strategy to become accepted as a legitimate industry most surprises you? As it increasingly becomes legitimate, how does pornography’s influence in our lives become more difficult to resist?
2. 1 Timothy 6:3-10 warns Christian teachers that their communication will become warped if they prefer money over the teaching of the true and good. How does this apply to other communication, such as the entertainment industry? If love of money is our problem, what cure does this passage prescribe?
3. What is “the greatest threat to the continued growth of the pornography industry” (*The Pornographic Culture*, p. 19)? How does the industry confront this threat?
4. Examine the ratings and reviews sites that Hoover mentions. How helpful do you find their information? What other resources help us evaluate films, television programs, music, and video games?

Departing Hymn: “Teach Us to Love the True”

Teach us to love the true,
the beautiful and pure,
and let us not for one short hour
an evil thought endure.
And give us grace to stand
decided, brave, and strong,
the lovers of all holy things,
the foes of all things wrong.

Walter J. Mathams (1913)

Suggested tune: DIADEMATA

† Adapted from Philippians 4:7-9 (NRSV).

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

Naked and Not Ashamed

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Question 1 or 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

[Note: This study guide covers the first half of Todd Lake's article, "Sex and the City (of God)." The second half is discussed in the next study guide, "Sex and the City of God."]

Teaching goals

1. To understand the goodness of human sexuality in God's creation.
2. To consider how the fall into sin distorts our sexual desire as well as our actions.
3. To explore how, in the Christian tradition, sexual union of man and woman can be a metaphor for our relationship to God.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *The Pornographic Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

"In much of pagan mythology creation is something wrested out of a primal chaos. The resulting order was sometimes good and sometimes tainted with a curse, the curse being experienced in the various problems attendant to living in the world. For instance, in early Greek myths about creation, sexuality is seen as a curse; it is a mythic explanation of the problems arising because there are two different sexes in humanity. Zeus blighted human beings by dividing them in two, thus weakening their threat to the gods. In other words, the evil that occurs in the world is 'in the system.' In the biblical story of creation, [however,] God created all things "very good" (Genesis 1:31)." (A. J. Conyers, "Living Under Vacant Skies," *Heaven and Hell [Christian Reflection]*, pp. 13-14.)

This passage highlights the power of stories to shape our moral imagination. If the creation of human sexuality is good and is not a curse, then what is the origin of shame in respect to our sexual desires and actions?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Voice a request that members will experience the true joy of relationship with God and one another which was part of God's intent in creation.

Scripture Reading

Ask three members to read Genesis 2:18-25, 3:1-13, and 3:16-21 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

This lesson is not about the pornographic culture. Rather it is about the goodness of human sexuality in

God's creative intent. "The only way to get something bad is to take something good and spoil it," J. Budziszewski has written. "Whenever you find a bad thing, look for a good thing somewhere in the ruins." The great good which the inauthentic sexuality portrayed in pornography threatens to engulf, is that male and female, in union together, comprise the image of God. True sexual intimacy goes to the heart of God's character and intention.

Briefly review how Christians have understood sexual intimacy as an earthly reflection of the eternal love among the persons of the Godhead (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and as a metaphor for human relationship with God. Of course, these Christians have not confused sex with God's love; rather they have identified the passion and oneness of sexual intimacy as the closest analogue in our human experience to God's unconditional love that seeks relationship. *A major point to emphasize in the lesson is this: for these Christians, human sexuality, as created by God, was not shameful.*

Yet, just as Genesis 2 is forthright about the goodness of human sexuality in Eden, so the Genesis 3 and the rest of the Bible is clear about the manifold ways in which our sexuality has gone awry. One such distortion is that men dominate women sexually, which is a far cry from the "helper as a partner" relation (contrast Genesis 3:16 with 2:20).

Therefore, we cannot "read off" from our current sexual desires and patterns of behavior the original intention of God. Our sexuality is a mixture of God's good design and our sinful effacement of that design. The next three lessons, "Sex and the City of God," "Simpletons, Fools, and Mockers," and "Habit's Harsh Bondage," will explore some specific ways in which human sexual desires become disordered.

Study Questions

1. Members will hear echoes of the Genesis 3 story in Lewis' title, "The Exposed Self," and description of the results of shame. Is the definition too narrow? Can we also feel shame when a family member, friend, or other person with whom we identify ourselves, does wrong?
2. Shame enters the story after the man and woman disobey God. When God comes to walk with them "at the time of the evening breeze" (3:8), they hide among the trees in the garden. God makes garments for the couple (3:21). Commenting on verse 21, Ralph Wood has said, "God makes the very best leather outfits, or Gucci clothing, for the couple."
3. You might assign a member or small group to survey each psalm. God (unlike an idol) is alive, responsive, but very much his own person, according to Psalm 115. We do not dominate God. Psalm 121 emphasizes God's constancy and loving, careful attention.
4. Members might want to distinguish the use of verbal from visual sexual imagery. The dangers include (a) worshipping sexuality rather than God, (b) sending a confusing gospel to people who have been influenced by nature religions, or (c) distracting our thoughts away from worship. They might mention advantages of erotic imagery such as (a) expressing well the intimacy of our relationship with God, (b) being drawn from common human experience, (c) underlining the essential goodness of sexuality in God's creative plan.
5. The hymn is a prayer for communion with God, "thy presence my light." It combines the language of love ("my Treasure thou art" and "Heart of my own heart") and the language of allegiance ("High King of heaven" and "O Ruler of all").

Departing Hymn

Verses 1, 2a, 4b, and 5 of the familiar hymn "Be Thou My Vision" are reprinted on p. 49 of *The Pornographic Culture*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Sex and the City of God

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Question 1 or 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

[Note: This study guide covers the second half of Todd Lake’s article, “Sex and the City (of God).” The first half is discussed in the previous study guide, “Naked but Not Ashamed.”]

Teaching goals

1. To understand the Apostle Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 6-7 on sex for married and single Christians.
2. To reflect on why some non-exploitative, consensual sexual behavior falls short of God’s intention.
3. To understand the role of human sexuality in the new creation.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *The Pornographic Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

A friend, John, who teaches philosophy at a Baptist college, has a well-deserved reputation as a spiritual counselor. So a student leader of the campus Christian group, who was newly engaged to a beautiful young woman, sought out my friend for advice.

“What do you think about recreational sex?” the young man asked.

John was puzzled by the question. “Well, Christians should enjoy sex,” he replied.

“Of course, but I meant, can we go to clubs on the weekend and find someone who wants casual sex? I’ve done this all through college, but my fiancée thinks I must stop it after we’re married,” the young man complained. “You think it is O.K., don’t you?”

How would you answer this young Christian’s question? This encounter reminds us that some Christians’ views on sexuality are shaped by the powerful patterns of our culture, rather than by Scripture.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Ask the group to read aloud the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a member to read aloud 1 Corinthians 6:13b-20 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The lesson focuses on Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians 6-7 concerning sex in the “new creation” of God’s kingdom. Throughout this section Paul is responding to the Corinthians’ statements or questions, either actual ones that they wrote to him, or imagined ones that represent their views. Interpreters must distinguish when Paul is stating a Corinthian statement or question, and when he is responding. (For instance, the scripture reading begins with 6:13b because “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food” in 6:13a is not Paul’s teaching, but a Corinthian statement.)

Like the undergraduate student in the story above, the Corinthians may have separated what they

did with their bodies from what shaped their selves. New Testament scholar Richard Hays translates 1 Corinthians 6:18 this way (*First Corinthians, Interpretation Bible Commentary*, p. 105):

“Paul: Flee fornication!

Corinthians [*objecting*]: [But why?] Every sin a person commits is outside the body.

Paul: But the fornicator sins against his own body.”

The Corinthians believed that what they did with their bodies did not count as sin. Paul responds sharply: they are sinning in their bodies and in the body of Christ.

The final portion of the lesson summarizes Paul’s teachings in 1 Corinthians 7 to single and married Christians. Paul, at this stage of his ministry, anticipated an early return by Christ and this may explain why he seems to teach, “Stay in the state of marriage or singleness that you are in now.” Yet, we find in his teaching this enduring, wise advice: sex is appropriate and joyful in marriage, husbands and wives are equal in regard to sexuality, not all single Christian people are called to remain single, but singleness can be part of one’s Christian calling.

Study Questions

1. Human sexuality is celebrated in the creation stories (discussed in the previous study guide, “Naked and Not Ashamed”) and Song of Songs. Paul says that sex is the unique bond between husband and wife. Yet he also believed that singleness was part of his calling and that this could be true for other Christians. Jesus lived a fulfilled, but celibate life. Our ultimate joy will be to participate in the “marriage supper of the Lamb of God” (Revelation 19:9b). Members might discuss the implications for single people in the church today. Does this imply that Christian singles are wrong to long for intimacy with a marriage partner? Or does it mean that we should honor those who are called, or gifted, to singleness as complete and full members of the body of Christ?
2. Many people today, like the church members at Corinth, evaluate sexual behavior only in terms of pleasure and promises: if the partners consent to the terms of the relationship, then they may treat and be treated by one another as they desire within those terms. Paul finds in the creation story (1 Corinthians 6:16 echoes Genesis 2:24) the truth that sexual intimacy creates a singular union between male and female. He’s not making a psychological observation, but reminding us of how God has structured sexuality. The sexual sins listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 might be consensual, but they misuse this powerful union of sexuality.
3. Members may mention Paul’s subtle way of mentioning the wife’s right to sex first in verse 3, but reversing the order in verse 4; even in this way he manages to treat husbands and wives equally. Theodore of Cyrus concludes Paul must be “inspired by divine grace;” for if Paul were inspired by his (or our) culture, he would have granted men the right to have sex whenever and with whom-ever they please. Encourage members to discuss Paul’s understanding that the husband’s body “belongs” to the wife, and vice versa (NIV). For this reason, Paul does not go the other direction with equality and say that wives, too, can have sex whenever and with whomever they please.

Departing Hymn

“Sacred the Body” is on pp. 56-57 of *The Pornographic Culture*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a closing prayer.

Simpletons, Fools, and Mockers

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To contrast the ways of Wisdom and Folly in the biblical wisdom tradition.
2. To understand the simple, the fool, and the mocker as key stages in the descent into folly.
3. To identify the hope we share for avoiding the snares of folly.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *The Pornographic Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with a story

Retell the story in Proverbs 7:6-20 in your own words. Incorporate locations or events that help the group imagine this occurring in their city. Conclude with a question: "How distant is this ancient story from our time and place, from internet sex chat rooms or ads for 'adult' clubs?"

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Close this time of prayer by asking members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask three members to read Proverbs 9:1-6, 9-10, and 13-18 from a modern translation.

Reflection

Folly pretends to offer a satisfying meal, though she has only stolen bread and water in the house. The real meal of home-baked bread and fine wine is in the house of Wisdom. Our deepest desires will be satisfied at Wisdom's banquet. "Dear Lord, you alone know what my soul truly desires," says the prayer, "and you alone can satisfy those desires." If time permits, members may want to read aloud the additional proverbs about folly. They reinforce her 'pretender' status, because she always leaves us unsatisfied with our lives and desiring more.

The ancient Israelite sages realized that how we respond to the allure of folly depends, in part, on our character. Though they were not social scientists, they observed three patterns of response to folly and to instruction, in the simple, the fool, and the mocker. These characters are distinguished by (a) how much they know about themselves and the world, and (b) how much they care about wisdom. Wilson sees them as three stages of descent into folly. The simple person does not understand fully the path he's tempted to follow; hence, he can be corrected by wise instruction from a person whom he trusts. The fool's understanding has been darkened and his desires are changing, for he is beginning to enjoy his ignorance. Ironically, the fool is losing self-control precisely because he trusts his own insight over all others' perspectives; no one can teach him. The mocker is completely turned around in his confusion and misshapen desires; he rebels against wisdom. Indeed, he is a recruiter for folly, tempting others to

their destruction. If time permits, members may study the verses delineating each of these character patterns.

This ancient observation of folly's descent remains quite contemporary. This pattern illuminates people's varying responses to the folly of pornography.

Cosmetic breast implants are a related symptom of our foolish ways. How can we explain the distorted desires that drive the clients who seek these products in order to become desirable, or the surgeons who provide what they seek? The Dardens say the female breast has become a focus of idolatry, or body worship. Are there other industries that reflect our 'body worship'? The ancient sages' delineation of simple, foolish, and mocking responses may help us sort through the varying, twisted motivations that the Dardens describe.

Study Questions

1. Wisdom is a diligent and hard working hostess (1-2). Folly is loud, but ignorant (13); she lazily sits at the door to her house, while Wisdom busily prepares her home for guests. Both call the simple to "turn in" to their houses (4, 16). Wisdom offers a real, delicious public banquet of bread and wine (5); Folly extends no such hospitalities, providing only stolen water and bread to be consumed in secret (17). The key difference is that Lady Wisdom exhorts her guests toward maturity and the way of life and insight (6) while Lady Folly deceives her guests into enjoying pleasures that lead only to death (18).
2. Learning wisdom begins with "the fear the LORD," or recognizing God as our Creator who calls us to a banquet filled with love and worship. "The fear of the LORD is glory and exultation, and gladness and a crown of rejoicing," the wisdom book of Sirach begins. "The fear of the LORD delights the heart, and gives gladness and joy and long life" (1:11-12). The simple persons' problem is naïveté and inability to anticipate the consequences of their actions; they do not know where to find true joy. Parents, teachers, and other adults with godly wisdom can warn the simple about how their actions shape themselves and their relationships with other people and God. The fools and mockers have no such hope, for they ignore and belittle their would-be instructors. Hope for the fools and mockers, Wilson says, rests largely with the Spirit of God transforming their deformed hearts.
3. One of pornography's many follies is the marketing, to men and women, of a superficial concept of beauty. Pornography proposes that our bodies are primarily for pleasing sexual and voyeuristic appetites. Let 's not forget that terrific minds, wonderful personalities, and delightful senses of humor, not just bodies, are part of what makes human beings completely beautiful. The Dardens remind us that God created the whole person and declared all creation good. Ask members to name ways that congregations can encourage the valuing of minds, personalities, senses of humor, desires for relationship, and all the other beautiful parts of human beings.
4. Members might review "Body Worship" for examples of each attitude, or construct their own examples. The simple are naïve and do not perceive the consequences of their actions; examples of naïve attitudes might be men commenting admiringly on the size of a woman's breasts or laughing at jokes about breast size, and parents uncritically purchasing fanciful toys like Barbie for their daughters. Husbands who pressure their wives into getting breast implants, women who desire to 'enhance' their bust size, and parents who consent to their teenage daughter's requests for cosmetic surgery all exhibit foolish attitudes; they do not resist social pressures, ignorantly demean God's good creation, and trust their own insight into what makes women beautiful. The cosmetic surgeon that built a giant swimming pool in the shape of a breast, with a Jacuzzi for the nipple, delights in his arrogance and the folly of others; hence, he surely is the mocker.

Departing Hymn

The familiar hymn "My Jesus, I Love Thee" is reprinted on p. 55 of *The Pornographic Culture*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Habit's Harsh Bondage

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Question 1 or 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To consider the power that images have to shape our appetites and responses.
2. To see how Augustine's account of habit illuminates how viewing pornographic images can become an obsession.
3. To understand why we cannot simply "will away" sinful thoughts and desires.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *The Pornographic Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and the suggested article before the group meeting. The tune BREAD OF LIFE is usually paired with the text, "Break Thou the Bread of Life." The alternate tune, ELLERS, is in most hymnals or www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with stories

"The dean of a prestigious divinity school is discovered to have downloaded to his computer several hundred pornographic pictures of women. It costs him his job, public respect and, we may surmise, a good deal of self-respect. The pastor at a large evangelical church is arrested for using a chat-room on the Internet to make contact with a thirteen year old and to solicit sex from her.... Each man, captive to images, traded his goodness for gratification. How are we to make sense of their actions? How can we understand the powerful lure of these sexual images etched upon their minds and their monitors?

"We might conclude that we are dealing with hypocrites of the highest order, with men ... whose religion is merely a sham, but that need not be the case here.... Somehow, images from which they could not escape gained occasional control over their lives." (*The Pornographic Culture*, pp. 31-32)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Close this time of prayer by reading responsively the prayer of confession in the lesson. The prayer begins in unison with lines in bold print, and the leader reads the lines in regular print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a member to read Romans 7:14-25 from a modern translation.

Reflection

We can become slaves to sinful desires and, as a result, become 'divided' selves. Paul says this in Romans 7:14-25 and Augustine reflects upon this in his *Confessions*. This pattern, as Thomas Kennedy suggests, helps us to understand how pornographic images can become an obsession for some people.

The study guide focuses on Augustine's account of how sinful desires develop into habits that enslave us. (For more discussion of the resulting 'divide' in the self, see *The Pornographic Culture*, pp. 34 and 36.)

Augustine grew up in a pornographic culture in Carthage, filled with powerful images of sexual immorality in the daily theater. In his writings he often drew upon 1 John 2:16 to account for the power of these images in his own life. (The NASB translation used in the study guide closely tracks the original Greek meaning as well as Augustine's Latin translation.) We have powerful appetites for sensual pleasure and for seeing something shocking and provocative, and a misguided tendency to believe that we can control these appetites (and, indeed, all aspects of our selves) by ourselves. Pornography attacks all of these weaknesses. In rightly ordered folks, Augustine suggests, reason would control any untoward appetites, evaluating them and then resisting their wayward pull. But in our sinful state, appetites are more distorted and their force is impossible to resist, so we find ourselves, as Paul says, doing what we don't really want (in our best judgment) to do.

At this point we can understand J. Heinrich Arnold's observation that we cannot simply 'will away' sinful thoughts or desires. Augustine's reliance upon God's grace makes psychological as well as theological sense.

Study Questions

1. Choices are involved at each stage in the seduction which Kennedy describes. Yet as certain appetites are encouraged and habits are formed, the choosing becomes more 'automatic' and we have less control over those appetites. For Augustine, this process of habit-formation and entrapment forges our 'bondage' or 'slavery' to sinful thoughts and desires.
2. Members might discuss ways that the pornographic industry anticipates and uses this psychological mechanism of habit-formation in its clients. The email solicitations, the difficulty in leaving Internet sites, the visually suggestive photos in magazines, the exploration of sexual history of celebrities, the production of movies with minimal but enticing story-lines, and the self-presentation of pornography as 'forbidden' are some examples.
3. Talbot's call for caution turns on the lesser 'control' that we have over our thoughts. It is easier to censor actions than thoughts. (A murderous thought enters the mind easily, but we manage to resist the murderous action.) So, Maximus warns that the spiritual attack will be directed toward our thoughts.
4. A 'sickness' interpretation might suggest the obsession (a) 'invaded' an unwilling victim like a virus, and (b) can be cured by medication. These suggestions ignore the role of will and choice in the cause and cure of the obsession. On the other hand, the obsession is like a 'sickness' in that it reduces our resistance (to other untoward appetites), impairs our functioning (by dividing the self), and causes further problems (in our relationships).

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a closing prayer.

Erotic, But Not Pornographic

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 or 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To distinguish erotic art from pornographic material.
2. To explore Song of Songs as a biblical example of erotic art.
3. To encourage Christian artists to produce erotic art that reflects a Christian worldview.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *The Pornographic Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and the suggested articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a story

Share the story John Peck tells about an experience he and his wife had as foster parents for a teenage girl (*The Pornographic Culture*, p. 74). This incident illustrates how the attitudes about recreational sex that are current in our culture can slip into our thinking.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Close with a prayer thanking God for the gifts of creativity and artistic expression. Ask God to help us reclaim the capacity to produce art that celebrates the beauty of sexual relationships.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins, and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a two group members (male and female, respectively) to read Song of Songs 4:1-7 and 5:8-16 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The evaluation of erotic art, Peck notes, prompts us “to go back to the basics” and acquire a biblically informed Christian attitude toward sex. Only then will we be free to appreciate and create erotic art that initiates us into a world where sexuality and lovemaking are imbued with the mystery and awe that is proper to intimacy.

Art is powerfully communicative. “Poetry can initiate us into emotions and desires beyond our normal experience, drama into experiences of social interaction, music to provisional moods, painting to fresh ways of seeing the world,” Peck observes. He urges Christian artists to produce art that invites our generation to explore and receive a biblical view of sexuality.

The Song of Songs can serve as a model for such art, according to both Peck and Singleton. By studying it as erotic art that is not pornographic, we can begin to contrast the biblical vision of sexuality with

the one we find in pornography. The Song celebrates the uncontainable fullness of God's gift of gender and sex; pornography offers a pitifully shallow view of humanity and intercourse. While the Song invites us to see how marvelous and wonderfully God has made men and women, pornography debases humans as divine image bearers.

After sketching the outlines of these two very different construals of sexuality, invite members to consider the redemptive contribution of distinctively Christian art.

Study Questions

1. Singleton identifies four biblical standards about erotic art from Song of Songs: (1) the Songs' eroticism glorifies the normal rather than the extreme, (2) it portrays the many dimensions of the lovers' admirable qualities, (3) both lovers have powerful voices throughout the story, and (4) their sexual relationship is linked to commitment and consequences. Members might contrast each of these standards with other views of sexuality commonly expressed in popular culture. To contrast these to pornographic material, ask members to explore the comments by Stephen Watters, Catherine Itzin, Mary Pellauer, and the Balswicks in "Other Voices" (*The Pornographic Culture*, pp. 58-60).
2. Storytelling is the most commonly found art form in the Bible, though it contains or refers positively to many forms of art, including music, poetry, sculpture, dance, and drama. When a story is skillfully told, its method of communication is indirect. Jesus slips his message past the mental guards put up by the prejudice, pride, and even logic of the lawyer. Peck recommends three criteria for evaluating art: (1) art must maintain the illusion of an imaginary world that is analogous to the real one, (2) the clues to art's meaning must be discoverable, and (3) the art's values should remain implicit, inviting discovery by the listener or viewer. Encourage members to discuss each of these criteria in relation to the story of the Good Samaritan.
3. Sheer adoration, awe, and wonder radiate from the man's face as he kneels beside the bed and looks upon the woman. His facial expression, much more than the woman's nude body, dominates the picture. The intended effect of this portrait on the viewer is not sexual arousal, but the realization of sexual self-giving, a quality unique to erotic love that we never discover in pornography. Members may connect this observation, as Peck does, to the intended effect of Song of Songs.
4. Members may want to develop several themes within these two quotations. The first quote mentions the impossibility of observing sexual love, for we cannot "crack the shell" of sexual privacy. A sexual voyeur mistakenly believes he is observing sexual love, but he necessarily fails to see the intimacy of sexual union. In the second quote Berry builds on this theme. Since sexual intimacy is essentially private and mysterious, good erotic art must make the viewer aware of what he or she is *not* seeing: namely, the two lives, with their shared history and mutual trust, which are involved in lovemaking.

Departing Hymn

"Sacred the Body" is on pp. 56-57 of *The Pornographic Culture*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a closing prayer.

Avoiding Pornography's Mess

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Question 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To consider the role of business in the pornography industry.
2. To provide resources for screening the content and value of contemporary media entertainment.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *The Pornographic Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting. DIADEMATA (commonly paired with the hymn text, "Crown Him with Many Crowns") will probably be a familiar tune to use with the text "Teach Us to Love the True."

Begin with a quote

Read Mercer Schuchardt's quote in the opening paragraphs of Martinez's article points to a tragic story about contemporary culture (*The Pornographic Culture*, p. 17). "Agnostic or Anglican," he notes, "it's pretty hard to deny the complete cultural victory of pornography in America today." This observation summarizes the dramatic upheaval in our cultural landscape wrought by the popularizing and marketing of sexually explicit material over the last four decades. What story does it tell about our culture?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently, and then voice common concerns of the group. Close by asking God to help members encourage and support one another to live faithful, transformed lives.

Scripture Reading

Ask a member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:3-10 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins, and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

The first section of the lesson describes the contemporary pornography industry and its alliances within the business world in order to gain greater cultural legitimacy and increased profits. Martinez says that pornography's increasing influence in our culture cannot be fully explained by the "inelastic" desires of its consumers and proclivities of its producers. ("Inelastic" is a term used in marketing. He explains this term in his article: "Demand for a product or service is defined as 'inelastic' if consumers desire the product so much that they are relatively insensitive to changes in price. Smokers addicted to nicotine are another classic example of such inelasticity.")

The pornography industry's growth depends, in part, on (1) an emerging cultural consensus that the sex industry is an acceptable economic enterprise, and (2) the complicity of highly-trained business professionals who have led the industry to adopt sophisticated business models.

Martinez predicts that if these trends continue, the pornography industry's toxic mess of distorted

desire will gradually seep into ever-widening segments of mainstream business. What challenges does this pose for Christians?

We should resist vigorously the growing legitimization of the pornography industry. Christians can resist the values peddled by the pornography industry by wisely engaging with and abstaining from the culture. We engage the pornographic culture when we articulate positive, healthy views of human sexuality informed by biblical, theological, and Christian artistic traditions. Abstaining from this culture, Martinez says, is becoming increasingly difficult and problematic. The pornographic culture more and more shapes the content of mass media, from popular magazines to movies and music.

Navigating this entertainment marketplace calls for discernment. Note that Hoover recommends that we look beyond ratings systems and seek counsel in the careful, timely judgment of friends and media critics. Ratings tend to be too generic, or restricted to reporting 'measurable' levels of sex, violence, and profanity. Reviews can explore a wider range of moral issues and give us balanced, specific advice.

Where do members of your group turn for reviews and advice concerning popular culture? Perhaps some members will want to examine the Internet sources that Hoover mentions and then report back to the group with their findings.

Study Questions

1. This is an opportunity for members to ask questions or comment on elements of Martinez's account of the pornography industry. One example of pornography's increasing influence in our lives is the narrowing gap between pornography and the sexual content for entertainment in mainstream media (including Internet, television programs, movies, music, and video games). Which came first, the spread of pornography or the lax social standards of decency? Members may mention specific ways in which the pornography industry seeks their attention, or the attention of their children.
2. When a teacher (or movie maker, etc.) is primarily interested in making money, her message becomes distorted toward what people want to hear (and are willing to buy). The cure for a love of money is contentment and godliness (1 Timothy 6:6-8). In other words, we must love what God loves more than we desire money. This does not mean that we be content with poverty, but that we learn to be content with 'enough' and that we not seek money for its own sake, or for winning comparison with others.
3. "The greatest threat to the continued growth of the pornography industry" states Martinez, "is an activist government that seeks to curtail the production and consumption of pornographic material" (19). Recognizing the seriousness of this threat, the industry actively engages in protracted legal battles and lobbying efforts, invoking free-speech arguments, to ensure that the industry remains as unfettered as possible in producing and distributing sexually explicit material. How active should government be in regulating this industry?
4. Members should be acquainted with rating systems; however, many may be unfamiliar with on-line review resources. Before the group session, you may want to suggest that members visit a number of the websites listed by Carl Hoover. Ask members to discuss what they found helpful or unhelpful about the websites they visited. Would members regularly use these resources? Where do members of your group find helpful reviews and advice regarding their personal or family entertainment choices?

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a closing prayer.