

# Fellow believers helping persons addicted to pornography by becoming an embodiment of love



## Author:

Gert Breed<sup>1</sup> 

## Affiliation:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Practical Theology, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Gert Breed,  
gert.breed@nwu.ac.za

## Dates:

Received: 20 Jan. 2022  
Accepted: 23 Mar. 2022  
Published: 30 June 2022

## How to cite this article:

Breed, G., 2022, 'Fellow believers helping persons addicted to pornography by becoming an embodiment of love', *In die Skriflig* 56(1), a2834. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v56i1.2834>

## Copyright:

© 2022. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Considering the growing problem of different internet addictions and their impact on individuals, couples, families, the church and society, it is important that churches seek to address the need for effective loving guidance in their pastoral care. This article examines a way in which congregations could help a person addicted to pornography to grow to freedom. A literature study was done to describe pornography addiction and compared it to cybersex. Subsequently, the influence on relationships of constant involvement in pornography is discussed, followed by a discussion of the relationship between sexual addiction and intimacy, and the causes of the fear of real-person intimacy. The healing of wounds that have led to the pornography addiction is investigated. The Journey Program is also analysed to discern its theoretical framework and investigate the biblical foundation of each of its metatheoretical starting points. Finally, practical theological guidelines are proposed for pastoral care of the pornography addict in the context of a congregation.

**Contribution:** This article contributes to the understanding of pastoral care to the pornography addicted person and to the founding of a pastoral program based on the Word of God according to the convictions of Reformed theology.

**Keywords:** pornography; addiction; church; embodiment; love; pastoral care; pastoral counselling; cybersex.

## Introduction

An overview of the considerable bulk of research presented in dissertations, articles and books on the topic of sexual habits on the internet shows that theological reflection on this prominent phenomenon of our times is necessary to assist the church in helping Christians addicted to pornography and/or cybersex (Knauss 2009:329, 330). This article examines a way in which churches can help a person addicted to pornography to grow to freedom. In the first place, pornography and cybersex are described. In the second place, the influence of pornography and cybersex on the addicted person is researched, followed by a discussion of the relationship between sexual addiction and intimacy as well as causes of the fear of real-person intimacy, in the third part of the article. In the fourth place, the healing of the wounds that have led to pornography addiction is investigated. The Journey Program is also analysed here to discern its theoretical framework and the biblical foundation of each of its metatheoretical starting points. To conclude, practical theological guidelines are proposed for a programme that can enhance pastoral care of people addicted to pornography.

## Pornography and cybersex

There are many forms of sexual addiction. In this article, the focus will be on pornography and cybersex. *Pornography addiction* can be described as the compulsive and escalating use and/or production of explicit sexual material including images and actions for purposes of the viewer's sexual arousal and frequent climaxing in orgasm (Ford, Durtschi & Franklin 2012:338; Karaga et al. 2016). Pornography should be distinguished from *cybersex*. The latter can be described as all sexual activities that use the internet for written sexually explicit exchanges in the form of chats or instant messaging. It might also include the exchange of images or videos – either of the persons themselves or material found on the web, or it might take place in a multi-user domain (MUD) as a sort of computer game using avatars (Knauss 2009:330; Waskul & Vannini 2008:254).

No physical contact is arranged – a distance remains between participants. The relationship involves no commitment and can be broken at any time without any explanation or visible

## Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

consequences. The relationship, however, is based on the exchange of intimate and arousing information that creates a sense of intimacy and trust. It becomes a forum for sincere self-disclosure that results in one's being-known by the other (Knauss 2009:336–337). Ben-Ze'ev (2004:26) characterises cyber-relationships correctly as 'detached attachment' (cf. Ferree 2003:389). Cybersex may include pornographic material.

More and more studies recognise the increasing problem of pornography and cybersex addiction and its harmful effect on the addicted persons and the people close to them (Carnes 2013:15–19; Morgan 2008:7; Schneider 2003; Struthers 2010:iii; Toronto 2009:120). Kennedy (2008) summarises the situation as follows:

While not listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), sexual addiction is widely recognized as a harmful behavior with a strong biochemical component (e.g., by the Mayo Clinic). (p. 30)<sup>1</sup>

Some researchers doubt whether pornography and cybersex addiction really are addictions or whether they are just labels attached to persons because of religiously inspired shame and guilt (Cohn 2014:77–79; Coleman 2003:12; Thomas 2016:183–185). Other researchers (Delmonico & Miller 2003) prefer to speak of compulsive and non-compulsive users of pornography and cybersex (Cohn 2014:76). Other terms that are used to describe the phenomenon are *hypersexuality*, *problematic sexual behaviour*, *obsessive-compulsive sexual behaviour*, *sexual impulsivity*, and *cybersex addiction* (Hall 2014:68; Knauss 2009:329; Miller 2015:82).

In this article, the term *addiction*, which points to compulsive sexual behaviour that is repetitive and persists despite clear devastating consequences and occasional attempts of the user to stop, will be used. Laaser and Gregoire (2003:397) identify three signs of addiction: unmanageability of behaviour; neuro-chemical tolerance in the brain; and escalation of behaviour. Cohn (2014:78) points out that there are various possible causes of compulsive sexual behaviour. Hall (2014:68) uses the BERSC model, which indicates five significant sexual addiction causes found in the following fields: biology, emotion, relationships, society and culture.

This article examines a healing process that can lead to the liberation from pornography and cybersex addiction with the help of fellow-believers who become the embodiment of love, forgiveness and acceptance.

## Influence of pornography and cybersex

Zailer (2012:s.p.) gives the following definition of a sexual addict: 'A "sex addict" is someone who utilizes their sexual experiences(s) to alter their mood or state of mind in a way that is destructive to them and their relationships.' Sexual addiction is not primarily centred on sex, but, amongst

other things, is a deep longing for intimacy. Pornography and cybersex addictions are common results when a person starts using a substitute in the place of healthy intimacy (Keane 2004:204; Zailer 2012:s.p.). Carnes (2001:3–4) describes the intensity of pornography<sup>2</sup> addiction and the improbability of a person overcoming it on his or her own (Zailer 2012:s.p.). The accessibility, affordability and anonymity of the internet make it the ideal place for pornography to flourish (Struthers 2010). Looking at pornography is, in essence, a secretive act that distances the user from other people while satisfying the person's own desires, regardless of whether it is at the expense of the self and others. (Schneider 2003:330–331).

Research shows that the brain of the pornography or sex addict undergoes changes (Ford et al. 2012:339; Hall 2014:72; Kennedy 2008:32). As in the case of a drug addict, the brain of a pornography addict starts to crave new highs in an effort to experience the same elation. In the normal course of events, the neurochemical craving in the brain feeds the obsession with sex and the compulsive and destructive nature of the problem consequently deepens (Berke & Hyman 2000; Kuss & Griffiths 2012). Pornography builds on the need for renewal, on the search for new and different experiences (Ford et al. 2012:338). That is why roaming from one pornographic website to the other, with the material growing in intensity, is the rule for most addicted people (Moore 2012:94).

Because pornography addiction 'literally rewires the brain, creating neural pathways that change how users understand the world' (Anon 2010:71), an addict's relationships with people become problematic. In the brain of a pornography addict, three-dimensional humans are flattened to screen pictures or paper dolls: they live in a world of make-belief and pretence (Fjerkenstad 2012:156). The people with whom they have sex in their minds become a collection of body parts that are available for use and cannot be touched, smelled or 'tasted' (Delmonico & Miller 2003:259; Ferree 2003:391).

Even if the religious convictions of the addicted person suggest the opposite, he or she looks at other humans as sexual objects. Sex and real intimacy are separated in the brain of the addicted person. Pornography supplies orgasm without real life intimacy, and often escalates to a point where the addicted person is not capable of being aroused by the real body and presence of another human being (Hall 2014:73; Luscombe 2016:40). Couples are then robbed of sexual intimacy (Hall 2014:68). This leads to broken families and a society that suffers from the stranglehold of pornography on addicted people (Anon 2010:71; Schneider 2003:329, 353).

Ferree (2003) reports on research conducted amongst women that are subject to compulsive use of sexually orientated

1. Sexual addiction is also not listed in the DSM-V of 2013.

2. In the rest of the article, the term *pornography* will be used to refer to both cybersex and pornography.

websites. She describes the difference between the internet use of men and women. She explains that research has shown that women are more active on websites where real interaction takes place, that is, where relationship-orientated encounters take place, such as chat rooms, live video feed with activities suggested by the viewer, discussion groups, or communicating online while masturbating. Research has shown that 80% of females addicted to cybersex indicate that they sought real-life meetings with their online sexual partners, putting them in grave danger (Ferree 2003:387–389).

While acknowledging the multiple possible causes, stimulators, processes and motivators behind addiction to pornography and cybersex, the focus here will be on the way intimacy features as one of the main factors in these addictions (cf. Ford et al. 2012:338).

## Intimacy, and pornography and sex addiction

In many (not all) cases, addiction to pornography and cybersex stems from a fear of real personal intimacy on the one hand and a deep longing for intimacy and unconditional love on the other. It may be that intimacy with and love from real people has become dangerous to an addict's life (Laaser & Gregoire 2003:402). Ford et al. (2012:338) aver that tolerance and withdrawal are distinctive factors of pornography and other addictions.

There may be multiple reasons why real intimacy becomes dangerous to a person. The *Journey Participant Manual* (2016:125–128) refers to 'broken boundaries' as one cause for fear of real intimacy and love. When there is a difference in power, such as between adults and children, there can be misuse of that power. In such a case, boundaries are broken. The person with the power instils fear in the vulnerable person to compel him or her to obey.

This can take the form of child, peer or witness abuse. There are different ways in which a person can be abused: physically, emotionally, sexually and through neglect. There is also spiritual abuse such as bullying or manipulating others to force a particular theology or spirituality on them; or abusing the power of the pulpit. When boundaries have been broken through an abuse of power in whatever way, the security of the person who has experienced the abuse, is threatened. They get defensive as Kennedy (2008) explains:

Sexual abuse tends to produce oppressive or repressive behavior. A victim will attempt to change the outcome of what happened through 're-enactment'. This is often done with subconscious motives. Four out of five sex addicts (sic) are sex-abuse survivors [...] Three out of four suffered physical abuse and nearly all have been emotionally abused. (p. 32)

## Causes of the fear of intimacy

Victims of abuse may experience abuse in different ways. The paragraphs below discuss some of these experiences that bring the victim to the conclusion that real-person intimacy is to be feared.

## Powerlessness

Some victims of abuse experience powerlessness, as the ability of making choices has been taken away from them. The long-term reaction of the victim may be to feel that powerlessness is part of their existence (Lockwood 2000:12). Some are convinced that they will not succeed in real relationships and will be rejected by everyone. Pornography then becomes a safe place where the person cannot be rejected – the one place where he or she remains in control. When shame and guilt over pornography use emerges, the person's (subconscious) excuse may be that he or she does this because of what has been done to them. In this way, a person seeking for control can become a victim in every area of life (Bouclin 2006:55; Hall & Lloyd 1993:292–294). Some victims who experience powerlessness, desire power and, ironically, turn into abusers of power themselves. Pornography may give an addict a feeling of power over people, seemingly without negative consequences.

## Betrayal

Abuse usually occurs in a relationship (Kennedy 2008:32). The abuser is frequently a family member, neighbour or older friend – someone the victim cares for and trusts. Suddenly, this trust is betrayed. Often, when the molested person speaks out about the abuse, the people whom he or she expects protection from, fail to do so. The victim subsequently becomes suspicious of all relationships (Bouclin 2006:58). Kindness and love are often seen as ways used by people to get something from the victim, and fear and distrust enter relationships.

When we have no safe place to process the feelings from abuse, we can suppress them [...] we may 'split off' from our heart – and legitimate emotions from the pain of the abuse go underground. (*Journey Participant Manual* 2016:129)

A computer screen with images then becomes the only safe place where such a person can have a relationship and experience some kind of intimacy.

## Ambivalence

A victim may experience conflicting emotions while being abused. The physical contact with the abuser may bring involuntary physical pleasure to the victim. At the same time, the victim experiences the pain of being used. This creates a deep sense of ambivalence and confusion, and even guilt and shame. The person may crave intimacy, but at the same time feel that it is wrong (Hook et al. 2015:179–188; Reid, Carpenter & Hook 2016:298). For the sexually abused, love is often eroticised: 'We begin to see close relationships and intimacy through the gaze of sexuality' (*Journey Participant Manual* 2016:129). Love becomes equal to sex.

To summarise: When boundaries are transgressed, fear enters relationships, and intimacy with real people becomes too dangerous to risk, as it is perceived to be unsafe. Pornography or cybersex presents the safe place where the victim can have

some kind of intimacy without risk. Here people can be in control and experience sexual satisfaction on their own:

An addict's brain doesn't discern whether his sexual behavior is moral or immoral – the addicted person only knows that this is a place to feel loved, important, and significant, albeit only temporarily. (Kennedy 2008:30).

## Healing the wounds and breaking the fear

Howard (2007:91) finds that the research on sexual addiction, which is a very complex disorder, is sociologically and clinically in its infancy. Although much has been written on the subject, much more needs to be understood. Sexual addiction is deeply rooted in trauma and the family of origin. All these issues will need to be addressed in an effective treatment programme.

Miller (2015:33) says that counsellors' views of counselling reflect their personal views and professional training. The experience they have had with clients also plays a role in the model they use in counselling. 'Each of us needs to find a theoretical framework that clearly reflects our approach to counseling', according to Miller (2015:33).

Only a few counsellors adhere strictly to one theoretical framework, as there is no single theory that explains every behaviour. The model that a counsellor uses, develops with time, and can be adapted according to the needs and personality of a client (Johnson 2004). Different researchers (including counsellors) point out that they should know and understand their metatheoretical starting points (Breed 2012:185–187; De Wet & Pieterse 2012:15).

## Journey Program

I have been actively involved in the Journey Program for the past 7 years. This programme is aimed at helping sex-addicted people become free of their addiction. At the moment, we are working mainly with university students and lecturers who have pornography addiction and/or other relational problems. Although the positive impact of the programme on some of the students' lives can be testified to (some of them, after being counselees for 3 to 6 years, are already leaders in the programme), the success of the programme has never been evaluated empirically. Positive word of mouth propaganda amongst the students on perceptions of the programme can be seen in the fact that, for 7 years in a row, the full capacity (about 22 students per semester) of the programme has been filled without active recruitment.

The theoretical framework or metatheoretical starting points of this programme have also never been described. Miller (2015:33) pleads for insight into the theory, saying: 'Understanding your theoretical counselling framework and its impact on counselling is as necessary in the addiction counselling field as it is in any area of counselling.' While it is impossible for this article to fully describe the theoretical

framework of the above-mentioned programme, it will be analysed, and some of the most important metatheoretical building blocks will be described.

## Theoretical framework of the Journey Program

The Journey Program makes use of a handbook for leaders and a handbook for participants. Each week, one lesson is prepared by all and lectured by one of the leaders. The leaders have a small group meeting where they share their life experiences with one another before the meeting with the participants starts. Each session with the participants consists of singing a few psalms and hymns together, teaching the prepared lesson, and having a small group meeting. After the small group meeting with the participants, the leaders meet again to give feedback about the interaction with the participants and their experiences of the session.

When the methodology and contents of the program are analysed, the following metatheoretical building blocks (forming a theoretical framework), each discussed briefly in its own right, can be discerned.

### Biblically based

The *Journey Participant Manual* (2016) states the basis of the programme:

We follow the biblical foundation of serving people with compassion, integrity and dependence on the Holy Spirit. In all we do, we share Jesus – the One who is full of grace and truth (John 1:14). (p. 8)

The leaders teach the work of the triune God and his relationship with broken people (chapters 2–4). They see Jesus Christ, through whom the believer has access to the love of the Father, as the centre of their teaching, and their goal is to make disciples of Jesus Christ (*Journey Participant Manual* 2016:8). All the teaching refers to the Bible as its source. Men and women are seen as the image of God. As they are broken, they must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and then a journey to healing and wholeness follows.

Around this meta-theoretical starting point, the programme differs comprehensively from other pastoral programs that are primarily based on psychological principles. In those programmes, certain isolated texts are the only references to the Bible to prove statements.

- Biblical foundation

In pastoral care and counselling, as in the Journey Program, it is important to use the Bible in accordance with its purpose. The use of the Journey Program will be enhanced by keeping the following aspects in mind.

In the first place, the teaching of the Bible can only be effective when the counselee believes that the Bible is the revelation of God's truths for our lives. The counselee should believe what is said in 2 Timothy 3:16 that the Bible is inspired by God and that it can be used to teach us the truth for our lives, to show

us our wrong ways, to teach us the right way and guide us towards a new life. If the counselling starts before the counselee confirms this conviction, the teaching during the programme may be, to the counselee, just another set of human opinions.

In the second place, the counselee should view the Bible in light of what is said in James 1:25, namely that it is the perfect law of liberty that can reveal you to yourself and that, if you live according to this law, you will be blessed. Jesus in fact also said this according to John 8:31, 32: 'If you remain in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' According to John 14:24–27, Jesus said that the person who keeps to his words through the work of the Holy Spirit will experience the peace that he gives. Only when counselees see the Bible as God's loving commands and as what he has given his children to live in freedom and inner peace, will it be possible for them to be positive about the command from the Bible. If the Bible and its teaching are seen as a law that is forced onto the counselee, the counselee will not be able to wholeheartedly seek God's commands in the Bible.

Teaching about the essence and nature of the Bible and how it is used in counselling, should therefore be made part of the Journey Program commencing lessons in the programme. Counselees should be led to examine themselves to determine what they believe about the Bible as the Word of God.

### Cognitive emotive counselling

Preparing and teaching knowledge related to addiction are core aspects of the programme. The leaders are instructed to teach truths based on their conviction and illustrate these with their own struggle to integrate them into their lives. The leader's journey from brokenness towards healing should make each truth a reality to the participants. The *Teachers' Guide* (2016) summarises this as follows:

What differentiates a JOURNEY teaching from most other types of teaching is your story. No teaching will be complete without telling a part of your testimony that relates to the content of the chapter. As a teacher, you will be sharing honestly and openly about your struggles but also about your healing experiences. (p. 13)

In the small group, the participants will be asked about how they relate to the content of the teaching and the testimony, and whether these are applicable to their own struggles and journey. The goal is to lead the participant through questions to discover, relate and evaluate hurtful experiences and assess their own convictions about what happened to them or what they did. They should also determine what emotions are driving their actions.

Prayer is an essential part of the small group's dynamics. The participants are encouraged to tell God what they have discovered about themselves and him, about their convictions, their emotions and to make his love and grace their own in prayer. Considering this method, the Journey

Program can be described as cognitive emotive counselling. This method is very important, because the addicted person must learn to experience and verbalise their feelings in the presence of other people and before God, breaking the secrecy that feeds the addiction. They can then experience acceptance from fellow-believers and confront their feelings of guilt and shame in an appropriate way.

- Biblical foundation

It is important that both the leaders and participants in a counselling programme such as Journey understand the role of needs and emotions in the dynamics of addictive behaviour. It is clear from different passages that God has created man with legitimate needs and that he wanted to fulfil these from the beginning. According to Genesis 1 and 2, God created humans with certain purposes in mind. To live a satisfied life, human beings should fulfil these purposes. God gave them everything they needed to fulfil their purpose.

To fulfil their purpose, humans need certain things. God supplied all they needed: the need for a living space (Gn 2:8), the need for food (1:29), the need for intimate and sexual relationship (2:20–28), the need for a relationship with God and his care for them (1:26, 27), the need to rule and achieve (1:28; 2:15,19–20), the need to procreate (1:28), and the need to finish their work and to rest (2:1–3).

Fallen and broken people try to fulfil their needs with things that cannot satisfy them on a deep, inner level (Is 55:2; Jr 2:13). The things they use to fill their needs sometimes become their masters and enslave them (Jn 8:34; Eph 2:1–3; 4:17–19; 2 Pt 2:9). God is revealed through the Bible as the one who can fulfil the legitimate needs of humanity (Is 55:1; Jr 2:13; Ps 23; Jn 4:10–14; 6:54–56; 7:37; Phlp 2:1). To break with addiction, one needs to break with harmful phenomena used to fulfil their needs. The counselee should be led to understand how God can fulfil every need and come to him for that.

The Bible closely links humanity's needs and emotions (cf. Psalms; Lamentations; Job). It is also clear that the Bible links humans' perspective on and convictions about situations in their lives closely with their emotions and their actions (Ps 73; Jnh 3, 4; Mt 20:1–15).

The Journey Program will be enhanced if the biblical view on humans' needs is explained to participants. The relationship between cognitive views (such as perceptions and convictions), emotions and addictive acts should be made clear to participants. This knowledge should be applied at appropriate times during small group sessions.

### Narrative counselling<sup>3</sup>

In the small group, participants are not allowed to give guidance to each other. The leader of the group will also only ask questions with a view to guiding the participant

<sup>3</sup>Narrative counselling is here seen in the sense of listening to the story of somebody, leading the person to discover his or her own story and to make sense by telling and answering questions about his or her own narrative. It should be distinguished from Narrative Therapy in the Michael White (2011) and David Epston (2008) tradition.

to self-exploration rather than giving direct guidance. The narrative stance of not knowing the other's story is thus followed, which leads participants to discover and reconstruct their own narrative. The other narratives on the table can open insights into their own. The narrative of the leader about his or her own struggles and victories as presented at the teaching as well as God's narrative that has been revealed in the teaching and the narrative of the other participants in the small group can all stimulate one to think afresh about the meaning of beacons on one's own journey. In this way, the members of the small group enter each other's narrative, heart and mind.

Miller (2015:134–138) has written a chapter about 'The core treatment process for addictions'. She discusses two philosophies about addiction, namely the idea of harm reduction and that of recovery movements. Narrative counselling as indicated, is aimed at recovery. The recovery approach is based on the strengths and empowerment of individuals. It works towards sustainable recovery based on the strengths-based approach (Jones-Smith 2014:1–33). The main strength the participants should embrace, is their identity in Christ and the meaning of their relationship with God with a view to their struggle around relapsing and recovery. This strength should permeate their way of thinking and believing.

- Biblical foundation

The Bible is a book filled to the brim with descriptions of human lives and God's engagement with individuals and with his covenant people. God reveals himself in the way in which he acts towards people in real-life situations. The Bible uses the narratives of human behaviour to reveal our convictions, attitudes, feelings and relationships with one another and God. When Nathan confronted David about his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12) and the murder of her husband, he told him a story that revealed not only what David did, but also his attitude, that is, his arrogance, lovelessness and cruelty as well as his blindness for his own sin. Through this story, Nathan opened David's eyes for the real meaning of his deeds and brought him to confess his sin against God (2 Sam 12:13). Nathan could then pronounce the forgiveness of God to a remorseful David. Another narrative of someone's life is recorded in 1 Samuel 13. Amnon rapes Tamar and sent her away in disgrace afterwards. In verse 20, the following is said about Tamar: 'And Tamar remained desolate in the house of her brother Absalom.' To help someone such as Tamar process her trauma, a counsellor should hear her story, her conviction about what happened to her, and who she is now in her own eyes as well as how she sees her future. The same is true of someone like Amnon, should he have come for counselling.

According to the Bible, when God admonishes or encourages his people, he goes back to his history (his narrative) with them (Ezk 16). The whole gospel is built upon the narrative of Jesus Christ and the implication that what has happened in someone's past can be forgiven or healed by the Holy Spirit

through the Word. When someone begins to believe in Christ, he or she is made part of God's narrative, his plan. In a certain sense, counselling is to lead someone to see his or her own narrative in light of God's.

The Journey Program will be enhanced when a biblically based narrative counselling can be further developed and implemented.

### Hope counselling

Hope counselling is based on the reformed understanding of grace, forgiveness, discipleship and community. While these theological concepts cannot be discussed in depth in this article, a short description can be given: God the Father gave his Son to live a perfect life according to his Word, to die for the sins of his children, and to conquer death by rising on the third day. The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to regenerate his children. Through faith they receive full and permanent forgiveness from all their sins, having been justified in Christ. The Holy Spirit guides them towards a life as disciples of Jesus Christ. While the children of God are holy through faith in Christ, they are still struggling to become what they already are. The indicative of God's grace in Christ through the Spirit is the prerequisite and ground for any imperative that is required from God's children. God gathers his children in the community of the church to serve each other with their gifts towards maturity in their faith and a life of victory over sin and addiction. Growth in knowledge about God's grace and growth in maturity of faith lead to growth in hope. Addicted people can build the process of recovery on the certainty of their redemption in Christ as well as the fact that they became children of God and that nothing can separate them from his love.

The *Journey Teacher's Guide* (2016) articulates hope counselling in the following way:

In **JOURNEY**, we'll walk a journey of hope together –asking tough questions, crying out to God, and listening for His voice. We'll have the chance to be open and honest about our personal hurts and pains – perhaps for the first time – within the safety and security of the **JOURNEY** course. Most of all, we'll stand at the foot of the cross, seeking God's healing, grace, forgiveness and strength to permeate our lives – waiting for Him to renew and transform our hearts. (p. 10)

Hope counselling differs from positive psychology and some strength-based therapies, as it is based on the paradoxical relationship between weakness and strength, which is described in 2 Corinthians 12:

And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness'. Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (v. 9)

Hope is fostered in different ways. The first is through knowledge of the gospel. When the gospel message is applied, that is, total and permanent forgiveness in Christ as well as the powerful work of the Spirit, it brings hope in

hopelessness. Another way is by living in the light. In the first session of the programme, all the leaders give their testimonies: they narrate their journey from brokenness towards healing, going into detail (for 5 min), and describing their current struggles, victories and failures. Participants may see the progress in the struggle of the leaders and begin to hope.

Participants may experience the small group as a safe place where their deepest fears, hurt and sin are revealed, and where there will be no judgement or rejection – only confirmation and exhortation. The knowledge that these people still love and accept one, even though they know the dreadful things one has done or what has been done to one, gives hope that one can be healed. The safe relationship in the group gives hope despite one's fear of relationships.

Every participant should have an accountability partner outside the programme. When in temptation or when they have fallen, they can contact their accountability partner. Accountability brings the participant before the love and grace of God and the encouragement of Jesus, who says: 'Go and sin no more' (Jn 8:11).

Lockwood (2000:25–41) explains three cycles in an addict's life, namely the obsessive cycle, the law cycle, and the grace cycle. The contrast between these three cycles illustrates the orientation of hope in the Journey Program.

The first is the obsessive cycle. The addicted person stays in this cycle if he or she tries to overcome the addiction alone or with external motivation only. If the addiction stems from prior relational wounding in the life of the addicted person, inner convictions play a central role in this cycle. Because of a significant prior experience, the addicted person forms convictions about at least one or more of the following: the self, intimacy, love, sex, gender, and more (Potter 2007:9–11). These convictions can flow from painful experiences and wounds and are then built on the person's own (wrong) evaluation of intimacy (Howard 2007:86). Naturally, convictions are unique to every individual, but they almost always include the belief that intimacy should be feared, because it is not safe and it hurts, or because the addicted person feels incapable of it (Howard 2007:86).

After falling again into their addiction, the Christian addict is left with emptiness, guilt and shame. This can lead to focussing on and reacting to the self as well as self-punishment by physically hurting and/or rejecting the self as unworthy of God's love or other people's acceptance (Howard 2007:88). The person may turn away from relationships and be drawn into a cycle of self-pity, self-rejection, and isolation from God and other people. The process of seeking comfort in pornography will then start all over again, bringing more guilt, shame and isolation (Karaga et al. 2016:168).

This addiction cycle leads to despair in the end (Cohn 2014:76). Despair either leads to a life with the addiction and no attempt to fight it anymore or to a confession before God

and a resolution to never do it again. The addicted person can hang on to these well-intended resolutions for a while. Mostly, however, they can only hang on without help for some time. The triggers will show up again. The pressure will be too much, because the real pain has not been addressed and legitimate longings not been fulfilled. The cycle starts all over again, sometimes resulting in divorce, loss of a job, or even suicide, because hope is lost (Lockwood 2000:29–32).

The second cycle is that of the law. It corresponds with the addiction cycle in the sense that the addicted person's real pain is not addressed, and legitimate longings are not satisfied. The motivation for change comes from outside the person. The law of God can also form part of a law cycle. The addicted person's motivation for change can be fear of God and fear of punishment (MacDonald, Kelleman & Viars 2013:476). The expectations of influential other people, or the possibility of losing something or somebody dear, can also play a substantial role in the law cycle. Churches may play a major role by directing people to try and overcome addiction with external motivation. This happens when the only thing churches do is preach against the sin of pornography, while they fail to support the struggling person with the love of God (Walters 2009:63, 64). Even accountability partners or groups can unintentionally bring the addicted person before a law – a requirement to which he or she must adhere. This happens when the addicted person must report on their performance in relation to abstaining from pornography only.

Relationships are not fostered and sustained towards a safe space where the truth can be spoken in love without the fear of rejection. The abused addicts live in fear of intimacy and love, and of being rejected. They may have failed countless times in their resolve and promises to never again look at pornography or to masturbate; now they must make more promises and live up to more expectations. Fear has brought them to the safe place of pornography, and a fear-driven solution will only intensify their longing for the safe space of the pornographic websites (MacDonald et al. 2013:171–173).

When someone lives in the law cycle, the motivation not to succumb, rests on fear and guilt. He or she can withstand the lure of pornography for shorter or longer periods, but the pain and the longing for an intimate, open and honest relationship are not addressed. The probability of visiting pornography in fantasy (visiting the prostitute or substitute in the mind) is high, bringing shame, guilt and ever-present loneliness because of the fear of intimacy (Walters 2009:63). The probability that the person will hide behind masks is also high, especially when he or she is in a position where piety is expected (as from clergy, for instance).

In walking the path towards healing and freedom with the pornography addict, no mechanical prevention method or behavioural conditioning alone can be successful.

Fjerkenstad (2012:156) says that some cures ask of 'the afflicted one to put a tasteless bit back in their mouth and

toil silently within the constraints they previously so wilfully discarded in their "illness". The inner decision-making ability, life convictions and core longings of the addicted person should be addressed in an appropriate way (Ferree 2003:392)

To enter the third cycle, that of grace, the addicted person should not only say 'no' to pornography, but should also say 'yes' to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The person should live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, praying and seeking to be filled with the power of the Spirit (Lockwood 2000:38–40). In this cycle, the unconditional love, forgiveness and acceptance of fellow-believers play a vital role. The addicted person is led to commit him- or herself to finding comfort from God instead of pornography (Lockwood 2000:41).

The basic principle of the grace cycle is that other believers come to embody the grace of God. The addicted persons are led into safe relationships where they can learn what it means to be accepted and loved unconditionally. A group of the addicted person's own gender minister God's forgiveness and the possibility of victory, and this brings hope into the addicted person's life. Hope is something that he or she needs to be able to get up after every fall and to believe that he or she is a conqueror in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Lockwood 2000:92).

An important part of the Journey Program is that it is focussed on making disciples of Christ, as is described in the grace cycle.

- Biblical foundation

Jesus' victory over sin and death opened the possibility of life from death. The same power of God that accomplished the resurrection of Christ is working in every believer (Eph 1:17–23). An important part of the counselling is to lead the addicted person to a decision to live as a disciple of Christ.

The hope of the believer is based on the work of the triune God on their behalf and in them. The completed work of Christ gives them the certainty that nothing can separate them now from the love of God (Rm 8). The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit gives them the certainty that they can conquer the addiction. The Holy Spirit reminds them of these facts – even when they have fallen various times. This gives hope to the addicted person to persist.

The principles of Lockwood's cycles (2000:25–41) should be explained to participants and be integrated into the way the Journey Program fosters hope in a small group.

## Conclusion

Considering the growing problem of different internet addictions and their impact on individuals, couples, families, the church and society, it is important that churches seek to address the need for effective loving guidance in their

pastoral care. With the Journey Program as a basis and the added biblical perspectives, a new course can be developed that can enhance the pastoral care given to pornography addicted people:

- For churches who accept the Bible as the authoritative source document of the Christian church, a programme that uses the revelation of God about himself to fill the core need of the addicted person for forgiveness, unconditional love and acceptance should be developed.
- The emphasis in the Bible on the importance of knowledge about God and his plan of redemption as a way to healing should be honoured in the programme by using reading work and in-depth and systematic teaching of the core related doctrines.
- The biblical emphasis on relationships within the faith community should be honoured during the interaction in small groups where the love and grace of God is embodied by fellow believers.
- The addicted person should be led by questions to explore his or her history, emotions, convictions and relationships without being influenced or pushed by the insights of the leader and other participants.
- The severity of the addiction and the difficulty of breaking with it should be acknowledged by the length of the programme and the fact that everyone should have an accountability partner.
- The programme should use different pastoral approaches, as itemised above, to address the whole person in the various needs flowing from the struggle to break with the addiction.
- Confidentiality should be an essential element in the programme.
- The embodiment of love and acceptance should be a key element for the recovery of someone for whom love has become dangerous.
- A balance between non-directive counselling such as narrative counselling on the one hand, and directive counselling on the other, should be part of the small group dynamic.
- The addicted person should, at the end of the programme, be entrusted to the care of a local church. If the warmth of the small group experience ends abruptly, it can lead to relapse.
- Equipping pastors and other congregants to understand these principles should be an essential part of such a programme.
- Healing and becoming a disciple of Christ should go hand in hand.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Author's contributions

G.B. is the sole author of this article.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

## Funding information

The research was funded by the North-West University.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

## References

- Anon, 2010, 'Editorial to an equal opportunity destroyer: How porn damages women, and what churches can do about it', *Christianity Today* 54, 71.
- Ben-Ze'ev, A., 2004, *Love online: Emotions on the internet*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Berke, J.D. & Hyman, S.E., 2000, 'Addiction, dopamine, and the review molecular mechanisms of memory', *Neuron* 25(3), 515–532. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0896-6273\(00\)81056-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0896-6273(00)81056-9)
- Bouclim, M.E., 2006, *Seeking wholeness: Women dealing with abuse of power in the Catholic Church*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.
- Breed, G., 2012, 'Metateoretiese vertrekpunte ten opsigte van wetenskaplike navorsing in Pastoraal', in B.J. de Klerk & F.W. de Wet (reds.), *Met die oog op God: Voorveronderstellings van die reformatoriese invalshoek op beoefening van Praktiese Teologie*, pp. 185–206, Potchefstroom Teologiese Publikasies, Noordbrug, Potchefstroom.
- Carnes, P., 2001, *Out of the shadows: Understanding sexual addiction*, Hazelden Information & Educ, Hazelden, MN.
- Carnes, P., 2013, *Don't call it love: Recovery from sexual addiction*, Bantam Books, New York, NY.
- Cohn, R., 2014, 'Calming the tempest, bridging the gorge: Healing in couples ruptured by "sex addiction"', *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 29(1), 76–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2013.869314>
- Coleman, E., 2003, 'Compulsive sexual behavior: What to call it, how to treat it', *Sexual Report* 31, 12–7.
- De Wet, F.W. & Pieterse, H.J.J., 2012, 'Die noodsaak van die verrekening van metateoretiese vertrekpunte in prakties-teologiese ondersoek en wetenskapsbeoefening', in B.J. de Klerk and F.W. de Wet (reds.), *Met die oog op God: Voorveronderstellings van die reformatoriese invalshoek op beoefening van Praktiese Teologie*, pp. 14–31, Potchefstroom Teologiese Publikasies, Noordbrug, Potchefstroom.
- Delmonico, D.L. & Miller, J.A., 2003, 'The Internet sex screening test: A comparison of sexual compulsives versus non-sexual compulsives', *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 18(3), 259–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468199031000153900>
- Epston, D., 2008, *Down under and up over*, AFT Publishing, Warrington.
- Ferree, M.C., 2003, 'Women and the web: Cybersex activity and implications', *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 18(3), 385–393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468199031000153973>
- Fjerkenstad, J., 2012, 'In my opinion: Treatment that mirrors the dark world', *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 19(1–2), 156–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720162.2012.665292>
- Ford, J.J., Durtschi, J.A. & Franklin, D.L., 2012, 'Structural therapy with a couple battling pornography addiction', *American Journal of Family Therapy* 40(4), 336–348. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2012.685003>
- Hall, L. & Lloyd, S., 1993, *Surviving child sexual abuse: A handbook for helping women challenge their past*, Falmer Press, New York, NY.
- Hall, P., 2014, 'Sex addiction: An extraordinarily contentious problem', *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 29(1), 68–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2013.861898>
- Hook, J.N., Farrell, J.E., Ramos, M., Davis, D.E., Van Tongeren, D.R. & Grubbs, J., 2015, 'Religiousness and congruence between sexual values and behaviors', *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 34, 179–189.
- Howard, M.D., 2007, 'Escaping the pain: Examining the use of sexually compulsive behavior to avoid the traumatic memories of combat', *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 14(2), 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720160701310443>
- Johnson, J.L., 2004, *Fundamentals of substance abuse practice*, Brooks/Cole, Belmont, CA.
- Jones-Smith, E., 2014, *Strengths-based therapy: Connecting theory, practice and skills*, Sage, Los Angeles, CA.
- Journey Participant Manual*, 2016, *Journey discipleship course*, Journey South Africa, Mulbarton.
- Journey Teacher's Guide*, 2016, *Journey discipleship course*, Journey South Africa, Mulbarton.
- Karaga, S., Davis, D.E., Choe, E. & Hook, J.N., 2016, 'Hypersexuality and religion/spirituality: A qualitative review', *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 23(2–3), 167–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720162.2016.1144116>
- Keane, H., 2004, 'Disorders of desire: Addiction and problems of intimacy', *Journal of Medical Humanities* 25, 189–204. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JOMH.0000036637.03254.38>
- Kennedy, J.W., 2008, 'Help for the sexually desperate', *Christianity Today* 52, 28–35.
- Knauss, S., 2009, 'Transcendental relationships? A theological reflection on cybersex and cyber-relationships', *Theology & Sexuality* 15(3), 329–348. <https://doi.org/10.1558/tse.v15i3.329>
- Kuss, D.J. & Griffiths, M.D., 2012, 'Internet and gaming addiction: A systematic literature review of neuroimaging studies', *Brain Science* 2(3), 347–374. <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci2030347>
- Laaser, M.R. & Gregoire, L.J., 2003, 'Pastors and cybersex addiction', *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 18(3), 395–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468199031000153982>
- Lockwood, C.R., 2000, *Falling forward: The pursuit of sexual purity*, Desert Seram Press, Anaheim.
- Luscombe, B., 2016, 'Porn and the threat to virility: The first generation of men who grew up with unlimited online porn sound the alarm', *Time* 187(13), 40.
- MacDonald, J., Kelleman, B. & Viars, S., 2013, *Christ-centered biblical counseling: Changing lives with God's changeless truth*, Harvest House, Eugene, OR.
- Miller, G.A., 2015, *Learning the language of addiction counselling*, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ.
- Moore, R., 2012, 'Equipping the generations: Fake love, fake war: Why so many men are addicted to video games and internet porn', *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 3, 94–95.
- Morgan, T.C., 2008, 'Deputy managing editor porn's stranglehold', *Christianity Today* 52, 7.
- Potter, J.V., 2007, *Counseling addicts and offenders: A guide to criminal justice counselling*, AFS Publishing Company, Redding, CA.
- Reid, T.C., Carpenter, N.B. & Hook, J.N., 2016, 'Investigating correlates of hypersexual behavior in religious patients', *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 23(2–3), 296–312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720162.2015.1130002>
- Schneider, J.P., 2003, 'The impact of compulsive cybersex behaviours on the family', *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 18(3), 329–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/146819903100153946>
- Struthers, W.M., 2010, *Wired for intimacy: How pornography hijacks the male brain*, IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL.
- Thomas, J.N., 2016, 'The development and deployment of the idea of pornography addiction within American evangelicalism', *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 23, 182–195.
- Toronto, E., 2009, 'Time out of mind dissociation in the virtual world', *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 26, 117–133.
- Walters, T.A., 2009, *Dynamic biblical counseling*, Xlibris, Bloomington, IN.
- Waskul, D.D. & Vannini, P., 2008, 'Ludic and Ludic(rous) relationships: Sex, play, and the internet', in S. Holland (ed.), *Remote relationship in a small world*, pp. 241–261, Peter Lang, New York, NY.
- White, M., 2011, *Narrative practice: Continuing the conversations*, W.W. Norton & Company, London.
- Zailer, D., 2012, *When lost men come home – not for men only: A journey to sexual integrity*, Rakuten Kobo, Toronto.