



LIE #1

My Pornography Addiction Defines Who I Am

I was walking in the park and this guy waved at me. Then he said, "I'm sorry, I thought you were someone else." I said, "I am."

DEMETRI MARTIN

Who are you? If you're anything like most people, especially men, your first response to that question is probably your job title. After that, you may list off your age, how many kids you have, or perhaps even your hobbies. If I had been asked that question a few years back, I would have answered, "I am a graphic designer." This is true, but it's not really who I am—it's just what I do to pay the bills. I might also have told you that I am a dad to the coolest (and cutest) girl in the world, that I like being in the mountains, and that I love bacon almost as much as I love air. Here's the deal, though—these things may *describe* me, but they do not *define* me. In order to figure out what defines you—your true identity—you need to understand who your Creator says you are. After all, He's the One who made you, so He is the only one with the authority to give you an identity.

TRUTH: Only God can define who you are.

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If you don't understand who God says you are, you are left to fill your identity void on your own. Anywhere you look outside of Him will result in a false identity, because your true identity is not something you can create or achieve—it can only be received.

Satan will try to exploit your identity void in a myriad of ways in order to wreak havoc in your life. One of the most prolific ways he does this is by convincing you that your identity is defined by your sin—or by the sins of others against you. How many times have you thought, *I am a terrible sinner*, or placed labels on yourself such as *stupid*, *worthless*, *dirty*, *failure*, and so on? Once you look to the Bible and see the truth about what God says about you, you will see that none of these labels are true about you. They are all false identities.

Common False Identities

Not all false identities are based on “bad things.” In fact, it's quite common for men to seek to find their identity in things most people would consider to be good. The problem with this approach, though, is these “good things” tend to become “god things,” because we allow them to replace God as the most important part of our lives.

In order to see this more clearly, let's take a look at a few of the more common false identities men tend to latch onto.

Social Groups

I had no idea who I was in middle school, so I kept trying on new identities to see if any of them would bring me lasting fulfillment. And like most teenagers, I believed that fulfillment would come once I discovered an identity that granted me acceptance into the right social group.

I tried out life as the funny kid, desiring to be loved and accepted for my wit and humor. When that didn't work, I tried to define myself as a Rollerblader, hoping that the athletic adrenaline junkie crowd would think I was cool. I actually wore my kneepads and wrist guards all day at school so everyone could see how hardcore I was (it was the '90s—cut me some slack).

Nothing ever fit quite right, so I started experimenting with shadier identities—rebel, smoker, stoner, raver, and on down the line. Every time

I tried on a new identity, I would jump into the new culture with reckless abandon in an attempt to gain answers to who I truly was. This pursuit led me into all kinds of negative behaviors, like shoplifting, drug use, and heavy partying. Ironically, I continued to stay involved with my church youth group this entire time, yet I never thought to look at who God said I was. I kept looking to my circle of friends to define me.

We really aren't that different as adults, are we? We may have become smarter about navigating social circles since we were in high school, but the underlying search for an identity still continues. Many of us are still searching for our identities in the sports team we root for, the political party we support, or other social circles we are proud to be a part of.

For example, are some Yankee fans so passionately opposed to Red Sox fans because they have placed their identity in being a Yankee, and to root against the Yankees is to root against them as a person? Likewise, if your identity is in a political party and someone votes for the opposing party, it feels like they are voting against you personally. Every time they state an opinion your party disagrees with, you take it as an assault on your own character.

When you allow your social circles to define who you are, you end up seeking fulfillment and happiness from a group of people and the circumstances that surround them. When things are going well, you are happy. When people agree with you and accept you, life seems wonderful. But what happens when things change for the worse, as they inevitably will? This is why it's so important to find your identity in something—or more specifically, Someone—who will never change.

Hobbies

I could write an entire book outlining all the ways I've attempted to find my identity through hobbies, but there is one that stands above the rest—being a mountain man. Here's a segment I wrote for an outdoor podcast explaining what I mean in a little more detail:

Once I got a taste of mountain climbing I was hooked. Our shared hobby of hiking as a couple had mutated into a singular passion that my wife didn't share. She would have been more

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than willing to go for a hike with me along a beautiful river, or even an overnight backpacking trip to a majestic mountain lake, but I had become obsessed with climbing and, over time, allowed the “We” trips to all become “Me” trips. I’d be gone for hours on training runs or hauling my pack up the local hill multiple times a week. In the rare event that I was home physically, I was in the mountains mentally. The more I pursued climbing, the less I pursued my wife. I started to see her as a hurdle in my climbing quest. I stopped asking her if I could leave for the weekend and started telling her that I would be gone. I couldn’t see it at the time, but I had chosen the mountains over her.¹

I had allowed mountain climbing to become my false identity. I had found something I was good at, and it seemed to impress others. I could strike up a conversation with people and once they found out I was a climber they were suddenly more interested in talking with me. People knew me as the guy who climbs mountains, which made me feel rugged, macho, and manly. As Dr. Phil might say, it stoked my male ego.

But hobbies can never define you on the deepest level or show you who you truly are. You can keep climbing taller mountains, master your golf swing, or take bigger and bigger risks in the stock market hoping that it will finally meet some unknown need in your life, but you will always need to come back for more when the satisfaction inevitably wears off. Sure, hobbies are great and highly fulfilling, but if you are honest with yourself, you probably sense that no matter how much time and effort you devote to them, you will always crave just a little bit more. Your hobby may be something you do, something you enjoy, but if you allow it to become who you are—your false identity—it will fail you.

Romantic Relationships

Perhaps one of the more damaging tricks Satan plays on men is to convince them to look to romantic relationships to find their identity. This is

1 You can listen to the podcast at <http://dirtbagdiaries.com/the-shorts-dream-interrupted>.

one reason why men are so easily drawn to porn—because it can temporarily make them feel as if they’ve found the missing piece of their soul they’ve been searching for. But no woman, regardless of whether she is flesh and blood or pixels on a screen, can ever give a man his true identity.

I bought into this lie big time. I sought my identity through romantic relationships for the majority of my postpubescent life, which explains why most of those relationships were long-term but *always* ended in disaster.

I can now see that the pattern was quite predictable. I would meet a girl who was interested in me and quickly become captivated by her. I’d adjust my entire life to orbit around her—spending as much time with her as I could—often at the expense of all other relationships. Her friends became my friends. Her interests became my interests. We would quickly become sexually active, which made me feel validation as a man. All of this fed into me establishing my identity—and seeking my fulfillment—in being “So-and-so’s guy.”

Over time, though, the identity I was seeking would never satisfy because it wasn’t the true answer to who I was. The feeling that something was missing in the relationship would become stronger and stronger, and I would begin to feel a desire to look elsewhere for answers. Once I reached this point, the girl would inevitably sense me disconnecting from her. She would begin to feel like she wasn’t good enough for me anymore but didn’t know why. Once this began to happen, it was only a matter of time before we would start drifting apart.

Eventually, I would meet some new girl and start to feel like she might be the answer. My current girlfriend wouldn’t seem to be meeting my need for fulfillment in life, so perhaps this new girl, complete with all the passions that come with a new relationship, would be what I was missing. So I would break up with my current girlfriend, move on to the new one, and the cycle would repeat itself.

This same pattern defined my marriage as well. By the time I started to feel that my wife was no longer satisfying my need for an identity, she had already sensed my distance and taken personal responsibility for it as if it were her fault. Her self-esteem plummeted as she became more and more confused about what was happening to us. My expectations of her validating

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me and providing me with an identity had put her in an impossible position. It was wreaking havoc on her and on our marriage. It breaks my heart to look back at this now because I see how much pain I could have saved my wife, as well as my previous girlfriends, if I had recognized this pattern earlier.

I can't tell you how many couples I have seen divorce for no better reason than "we just don't get along anymore" or "irreconcilable differences." But what causes two people who deeply love each other to grow apart and eventually give up? What causes a couple to move from craving each other's company every chance they get to fighting intensely about which brand of coffee to buy? Are these fights actually the outpouring of frustration resulting from your spouse not meeting your need for validation—a need she was never designed to meet in the first place? Are you placing unspoken and impossible expectations upon her and setting her up for inevitable failure? As long as you look to someone other than God to provide your identity, she will fail you, and it will cause pain for everyone involved.

The moment any one of my false identities began to fail me, I would attempt to fix it by focusing all of my time and energy on it, often resulting in great neglect of other areas of my life. After all, if my identity truly did come from these things, what would happen if any of them failed? I couldn't bear to find out. What I didn't realize, though, was these false identities were actually distracting me from recognizing that my identity could only come from Christ alone.

Who God Says You Are

As far as God is concerned, there are only two possible identities for every man, woman, and child alive today. You are either "in Adam," or you are "in Christ." You must be one or the other, and you cannot be both. The most important thing to understand in regards to your identity—and ultimately in your battle against temptation—is which camp you belong to.

You are No Longer "in Adam"

The moment Adam chose to turn away from God and share the fruit with his wife, the cancer of sin entered into the human race and changed

the default identity of everyone.² Since that day, every one of us have been born physically alive but spiritually dead:

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned (Romans 5:12).

Our identity at birth is now “in Adam,” which means we are all born with a sin nature.

If you are a parent, it shouldn't be too hard to understand this. Unless your name is Mary, your sweet little kiddo didn't need to be taught how to sin. It's in their nature from day one to be selfish, to lie to you, to yell “NO!” when asked to do something they don't want to do. Did you ever sit down and have a conversation with junior discussing the benefits of dishonesty and how manipulation can be used for his gain? Of course not. Any child knows these things because they are born with a sin nature.

As long as your identity is still “in Adam,” you are separated from God because of this sin nature within you. You are spiritually dead. If this is your reality, the lie of this chapter is unfortunately true for you—your sin really does define you. You can do all sorts of good things here on earth, but ultimately none of them will matter in eternity because they will be done for your own benefit and not for God's glory. You are also forced to live your life, fight your temptations, and manage your pain using your own power. You are on your own. This does not mean God is not actively pursuing you while you remain “in Adam” (He certainly is), but ultimately you will need to reach out to Him and accept His help.

Don't be discouraged by this, though. If you are reading this book, there's a good chance your identity is no longer “in Adam.” Why? Because the moment you placed your hope and trust in Jesus, your identity switched to “in Christ,” and the separation no longer describes you! Satan will still try to convince you that even though you have placed your hope in Jesus (in Christ), you are still defined by your sin (in Adam). But remember, you are either “in Adam” or “in Christ.” It's fully one or fully the other. You cannot be both.

² See Genesis 3.

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You are “in Christ”

Just as everyone is born “in Adam,” everyone is also given the opportunity to be born again “in Christ.” The moment you place your hope and trust in Jesus to rescue you and set you free from your sinful nature, you are reborn with a new nature—a new identity. Your identity is now “in Christ.”

Chances are, you have a pretty good understanding that being “in Christ” means you are now reconciled to God. Even if you haven’t spent much time in church, you’re probably still familiar with John 3:16:

God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes *in him* will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16),

When we believe in Christ, we receive eternal life in heaven with God. Most churches do a wonderful job of preaching this central truth of salvation. What is sometimes missed, though, is the truth that this life “in Christ” is available to us right now! If we understand the gospel as merely the promise of eternal life after death, we remain stuck trying to live life here on earth in our own power—living as if we are still “in Adam.” We miss the reality that God has promised us His life (and all the benefits that come with it) today. It begins the moment our identity changes from “in Adam” to “in Christ.”

Let’s take a look at what Jesus teaches us about what it means to be in Him:

Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain *in me*, and I *in them*, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5).

This verse is a great positional statement showing us what happens when we live with an understanding that our true identity is in Christ: We will produce much fruit. We will receive His power in us to live the life He has for us. We will see all the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control flow from our lives.³

But what happens if we don’t understand that we are “in Christ”? We

³ Galatians 5:22–23.

will live our lives as if we are a disconnected branch and will quickly become discouraged by our inability to produce fruit by ourselves.

And what about those who believe they are doing just fine and don't see their need to be connected to Christ—those who choose to remain “in Adam”? No matter how hard they try, they will never bear fruit. They will be like a branch cut off from the vine left to wither and die on the ground. For apart from Christ, they can do nothing.

How many of you, like me, read this verse a hundred times thinking, *I don't see much fruit in my life...does this mean I'm not really connected to Christ?* Thoughts such as those are precisely what come when you do not realize that, once your identity is “in Christ,” it will never revert to “in Adam.” As long as you are questioning the security of your identity in Christ, you will live as if you are still partially “in Adam.” You will attempt to produce fruit on your own in order to confirm your own salvation. But it will never work, because you can only produce fruit if you are living out of your true identity in Christ. That's because fruit isn't the *proof* of being in Christ; it is the *product* of being in Christ.

Perhaps this will be easier to understand if we back up a few verses and see what else Jesus says in this passage:

You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me (John 15:2–4).

Did you catch that? You have *already* been pruned and purified through Jesus. The reason you may be experiencing a season of unfruitfulness is not because you were cut off or never attached, it is because you have believed the lie that you are not permanently attached to Christ. You are believing that something, usually sin, has separated you from Him. Simply put, you were not *remaining* in Him.

Furthermore, you may have been striving to produce fruit in your own power in an attempt to prove that you really were in Him. But the key to living in your true identity isn't to try to become who you think God wants you to be; it's to trust that you already are who God says you are. If

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you trust that Christ is really in you, and you really are in Christ, fruit will flow naturally. Like most truths in Scripture, though, you must choose to believe this first in order fully experience it.

Understanding Who You are in Christ

We could look at a hundred verses on what it means to be in Christ, and every one is amazing. I encourage you to do your own Bible study on the phrases “in Christ” and “in Him,” to see for yourself. You may even want to substitute your own name to make them more personal. For example, if we only look at a few such verses from Ephesians we see the following:

- [*Your name*] is chosen by God in Christ to be holy and without fault (1:4).
- [*Your name's*] purpose in Christ is to bring praise and glory to God (1:12).
- By believing in Christ, [*your name*] is identified as God's own and has received the Holy Spirit (1:13).
- [*Your name*] has been created anew in Christ to do the good things prepared for him by God (2:10).
- [*Your name*] is joined together with all other believers in Him and is now a temple for the Lord (2:21).
- [*Your name*] has endless treasures available to him in Christ (3:8).
- Because of Christ and our faith in him, [*your name*] can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence (3:12).
- Then Christ will make his home in [*your name's*] heart as [*your name*] trusts in him. [*Your name's*] roots will grow down into God's love and keep [*your name*] strong (3:17).

Throughout Scripture you will find these verses describing your true identity in Christ. Take the time to study this concept and dig deeper. Believe these verses are true about you because *all* Scripture is true—whether it

feels like it is or not. This may be one of the most life-changing studies you ever do.⁴

You are No Longer a Sinner, You are a Saint

Would you believe me if I told you anyone who is in Christ is no longer a sinner? What if God told you it was true? The truth is, He has told you just that:

You also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11).

When Christ took all of your sin upon Himself on the cross, He destroyed its power over you. Because of this, your previous identity of “sinner” died along with Christ:

My old self [sinner] has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

Now that the power of sin over me has been broken, I can trust that Christ living within me will empower me to live the life He has called me to. But not only that, I can also trust Him when He says that I am truly dead to sin. Which means I am no longer a sinner—I am a saint!

Saint Stephen?

Before everyone gets all puckered up about the word “saint,” it might be a good idea to pause and take a look at the biblical definition.

Many of us will hear the word “saint” and immediately think of the way it is commonly used within certain religious systems. But this act of bestowing the label of “sainthood” on an individual by a religious organization simply isn’t found in the Bible.

When we look to the Bible to define “saint,” we see the term being used to

⁴ Every Thursday, I share a new “in Christ” verse on my blog at www.belttofaith.com. If you subscribe, they will come straight to your inbox every week and can serve as excellent reminders of who you are in Christ.

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describe *everyone* who is in Christ. Paul begins multiple letters by addressing them to the “saints.” Some translations use the phrase “God’s holy people,” which is the same idea. Here’s the deal: These letters were written to the *entire* body of believers within each city—even the guy sitting in the back row who only trusted in Christ yesterday, still smokes, and continues to cuss like a sailor. It’s not just a label for the “varsity” believers who have achieved some special status.

According to the biblical definition, everyone who is in Christ, regardless of how far along they are on their journey toward sanctification, becomes a saint the moment they trust in Jesus. Being a saint has nothing to do with how good you are. It’s the biblical identity of everyone who is in Christ.

In the same way that you cannot be both “in Adam” and “in Christ,” you cannot be both a saint and a sinner. You are one or the other. In order to reconcile this with what feels like a very different reality—we all still sin—we need to look at it a bit deeper.

First, what is the definition of a sinner? One who sins, right? Nope. A sinner is one who can do nothing *but* sin. See the difference? If you are still separated from Christ, everything you do, no matter how noble or good it is, is done *apart* from Him. And anything done apart from Christ is sin. If you are in Him, though, you now have the ability to do good things “in Christ”—things that are *not* sin. Likewise, a saint is not someone who never sins, but someone who doesn’t *have to* sin. Sin has lost its power over you. You are not a sinner who has been saved, but a saint who sometimes gives in to sin.

We see this being played out with Paul as he shares his own continuing struggle with sin:

...I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God’s

law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me (Romans 7:18–23).

Sounds familiar, right? This same battle played out in my mind every time I gave in to porn. *Why do I keep doing this if I'm supposedly dead to sin?* Paul can't really be "dead to sin" if he's writing this, can he? Well, let's look closer. Paul clearly states in this passage that he loves God's law with all his heart. We also know he is a follower of Christ at this point by reading the rest of the letter, so it's clear that he is "in Christ." Therefore, he must also be dead to sin. But why does he still struggle? The key to understanding this seeming contradiction is to notice a few easily overlooked phrases.

First: "I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it." Did you catch that? *Sin* is doing these actions within Paul. Not Paul. Paul is a saint—dead to sin and alive to Christ. This sin does not define him, but it still influences him. It has no ability to change his standing in Christ, but it can still wreak havoc in his life.

This sin within us is commonly referred to as "the flesh" throughout the New Testament. The flesh is not us; it is a false self—a lie. At the end of our life here on Earth, it will die, but the real you will continue to exist. That is why Paul says it is not really he who is sinning but the flesh within him. His true identity—who he really is—is completely separate from this sin within him. It does not define him.

Second: "There is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me." Something else is inside of Paul. Something that is *not* Paul. The power he is referring to here is the devil and all of his minions, who are constantly trying to convince you that your sin *does* define you. They are trying to get you to lose sight of the reality that you are dead to sin. These powers are waging a war within Paul's mind (and our minds as well) by whispering lies and accusations in an attempt to lure him back into the bondage of sin.

As one who is "in Christ," though, you are no longer a slave to sin. But if you believe Satan's lie that you still are a slave, you will continue to live as if his accusation is true. As long as you still believe your identity

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is “sinner,” you will believe that you have no choice but to give in to sin whenever temptation comes. If, however, you believe that you are a saint, you will trust the Word of God when it says that sin is no longer your master. And once you chose to trust the Word, you can begin to live in the truth it declares.

You are a Child of God

You know what’s absolutely amazing? The God of the universe, Creator of Earth, the One who holds everything together, has adopted *you* as His child. But don’t just take my word for it:

To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God (Romans 8:14).

You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26).

Think about that for a second and just try to comprehend what it means. If you’re a parent, consider how much you love your kids. As much as you love them, though, it’s with an imperfect, human love. God loves you even more than you love your kids, because He loves you with His holy, unconditional, and righteous God-love.

Jesus tells us an amazing story of God the Father’s love in the parable of the lost son.⁵ In the story, a rebellious son demands his inheritance from his father immediately. Culturally, this was the same as telling his father, “You’re dead to me now.” But rather than yelling at his son or punishing him, the father gives his son the money, lets him leave, and waits in anticipation for his return. Every day the father looks off into the distance, hoping to see his son returning. When the son finally does return, the father doesn’t even give his boy a chance to grovel. He runs to him with open arms and tackle-hugs him at full speed! No matter how much

⁵ Traditionally, the “prodigal son.” Luke 15:11–32.

the boy rejected or disobeyed His dad, there was nothing he could have done to make his father stop loving him.

Do you realize this is actually a story about God's love for you? No matter how much you've messed up, He will always be standing there with His arms wide open—just like the father in the story—waiting for you to come home to Him. It doesn't matter what you've done or where you've been. None of it will make any difference in how much He loves you.

I didn't understand the depth of a love like this until my daughter was born. I can say without a doubt that there is nothing my girl could ever do to make me stop loving her. No matter how many times she hits me as a toddler, yells at me as a teenager, or disowns me as an adult, I will always be there waiting for her with open arms. I simply cannot fathom living my life apart from my favorite little girl no matter what she does. Honestly. I'm even getting a bit choked up now just typing these words and thinking about how much I love her. But as much as she means to me as my daughter, you mean even more to God as His adopted son.

What if “Father” is a Difficult Word?

I was blessed with an earthly dad who made it easy for me to embrace this idea of God as my Father, but I know that a lot of fathers have made this a very difficult concept to grasp. For those of you with angry, abusive, absent, or nonexistent fathers—I am so sorry you had to experience that pain. I wish I had an easy answer or solution for the suffering you experienced, but there is none. Please consider looking to God as your heavenly Father, though, understanding that He is a good Father and loves you with a perfect love.

As your heavenly Father, God wants to heal you from the pain of your past, not add to it.

You Have Full Access to God

As a child of God, you have full access to God whenever you want. You can come before God and ask Him to help you with your struggles, give

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you His strength to make it through a difficult circumstance, or give you His wisdom in a specific situation. You can come before Him and ask Him *anything*, because you have *full* access:

All of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us (Ephesians 2:18).

Not only that, the Father actually *wants* us to come before Him with our needs and desires. He honestly cares about whatever is on your mind:

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you (1 Peter 5:7).

Think of it this way. How hard is it to be granted an audience with the president of the United States? Apparently, there isn't even a clear path laid out for the average citizen to meet the president. The closest I could find was a page on the presidential website allowing you to enter your name into a drawing and hopefully win an invitation to a dinner with him—but it expired two years ago. That leaves me the option of performing some amazing act of heroism that will gain me national attention, or winning the Super Bowl (I think those guys usually get a White House invitation).

But what if the president was my dad? Do the president's kids need to enter a contest to win dinner with their daddy? Nope. They can walk into the Oval Office and hang out with him pretty much whenever they want. As a child of God, you've got that same level of access to Him.

Trusting that you have Christ living inside of you, that you are a saint, and that you have full access to God as His adopted son will free you from needing to strive to measure up or attain perfection in your own power. You can rest in the knowledge that you are accepted and loved exactly as you are, because you are family. Likewise, the things of this world—success, failure, riches, fame—suddenly seem insignificant compared to your position as a child of God. This becomes the biggest thing in your life. It becomes your identity.

As one of my favorite authors, John Lynch, puts it:

He lives in you! You are in Him! How much closer do you want to be than that? Every moment of every day, fused with you, there He is. He never moves. Never covers His eyes when you sin, never puts up a newspaper, never turns His back. He's not over on the other side of your sin, waiting for you to get it together so you can finally be close. It's incredible! Don't you think? That's why they call it "Good News!"⁶

How Does This Help Me with Porn?

Imagine you are walking down a crowded street and everywhere you look you see people scowling back at you. All you hear are whispers of accusation and condemnation. Not only that, but every alley you walk by is lined with scantily clad beauties offering you illicit affairs and promising you an escape from the noise of the crowd.

Picture this scene while thinking to yourself, *I am a sinner. I'm worthless. Nobody loves me. I am a slave to my sin.*

How do you respond to the accusations? How do you respond to the sexual temptation? You will desperately want to retreat from the fear and pain caused by the verbal assaults of the crowd. When you hear the offer of love and acceptance from the alleys, it will be nearly impossible to resist its pull. You know it's sin to give in, but you already feel like a failure, so what's one more mistake going to matter? By viewing yourself as a sinner, you have resigned yourself to the fact that you will eventually give in, just as you always do.

Now, picture the same scene again, but this time, think to yourself: *I am in Christ and He is in me. I am a child of God. I am a saint. Sin has no power over me.*

Is your response any different now? I am willing to bet it is. When you view yourself this way, it becomes much easier for you to ignore the condemning voices because you know the things they are saying about you are no longer true. When you understand how much you are loved and accepted by God, you won't feel the need to seek love and acceptance from the illicit back-alley opportunities. When you understand your true identity,

6 Bill Thrall, John Lynch, and Bruce McNicol, *The Cure* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 2011), 43.

LIE #1: My Pornography Addiction Defines Who I Am

it puts your eyes back onto God, His love, and what He says is true about you. It allows you to walk in His power rather than your own.

Understanding your true identity as “in Christ” will help you maintain a proper perspective. And in the same way this perspective empowers you to resist the temptations in the previous illustration, it will also empower you to resist the temptations you encounter in real life.

My Name is Stephen, and I'm a Sex Addict

I believe 12-step programs have helped countless people learn how to manage their behavior and live improved lives. For that reason, I am grateful that they exist and support them fully. That being said, I think there is one area where they are falling short of their full potential.

Standard 12-step programs will encourage you to identify yourself as an addict regardless of how long you have been sober. Yes, you may find freedom from the behavior of your addiction, but you remain shackled to your identity as an addict. As the saying goes: “Once an addict, always an addict.”

Christ offers you a new identity, though. Because of His freedom, you are no longer a slave to sin, which means you no longer need to identify yourself as an addict. In fact, your addiction can't define you anymore, because it's dead. It was crucified with Christ along with the rest of your sin.

This is why the gospel message is not about learning how to merely cope with or manage your negative behaviors; it's about being reborn into a reality where your sin has been put to death once and for all.

That, my friend, is true freedom from addiction!

So let me ask you again, who are you?

Are you a sinner? Are you an addict? Not anymore, my friend!

If you have put your hope in Christ, you are a child of God! You are a saint! You are dead to sin!

Try to remind yourself of these truths every day. It's amazing the difference they will make in your life—and in your journey to freedom from pornography.