

Dear Pastor,

No doubt, porn is a problem among us pastors. If it is your problem, God may be giving you a period of grace to deal with it. There are countless stories of pastors who have lost their ministry because of a sexual fall. They are tragic, and deeply impact those the pastor's ministry has touched. But there are stories of pastors recognizing God's *grace period* as a time to reorder their private worlds, and make some significant changes.

God told Noah to preach to the pre-flood community for 120 years, in hopes that many of them would change their ways, and be rescued from destruction. But many of them were left behind, since during that grace period they failed to hear God's message of grace through Noah's warnings. Like many pastors right now, living with their secret porn forays, the people in Noah's day simply went about their business as usual. Perhaps, at times they considered making some changes, even joining Noah and his family, but they put it off and kept putting it off until it was too late.

I've been there and I've played that game. It took years for me to face my problem to. Today I'm enormously grateful that I was never caught with my pants down around my ankles! At my lowest point I know I got careless, and even bolder in my use of porn. My wife caught me and some of your wives have caught some of you too. I could have, and likely should have been caught publicly. Thankfully that didn't happen, and when God's spirit broke through the dense fog of porn, and I responded during this period of grace, my ministry (and marriage) was preserved. It could have gone differently, I could have received that dreaded phone call from an elder, telling me that the church secretary had found something on my computer, or a member saw me in the adult section of a video store.

After addressing the issue privately through counseling and an intensive workshop, I went to my elders and began to share with them my story. I made phone calls to close friends, and family members, and wrote an e-mail to my colleagues in ministry. Pretty soon I was talking to my denomination's leaders, and telling them about my struggles with porn. I think they appreciated finding out about it from me and not a church member or the newspaper. Since there was no public scandal the leadership was able to approach my situation from a position of restoration, and support.

Please don't get me wrong this was no strategic move on my part. It wasn't some pre-emptive strike in order to keep my job, and hopefully avoid the embarrassment of being fired. God had truly changed my heart, and the peace and joy I knew was too much to remain silent. It wasn't easy, and I was prepared to leave my ministry, or remain in ministry and submit to whatever disciplinary measures leadership chose to take. No doubt it was a dark time, and yet in the

midst of that darkness God shined a marvelous light that continued to break through and shine out to others.

The irony in my story is that the very thing that I was so terrified of anyone finding out about is now the testimony that I have shared with thousands of people. No one knew my story except for my wife, and another pastor who I had confided in, and I could have kept it that way. But I'm convinced that it was a story that God wanted people to hear. The national attention my story has received (Newsweek Magazine, ABC News, Fox News, Associated Press, Focus on the Family) could have gone the other way. It could have been another story about a pastor being caught with pornography, and how he's now being removed from ministry. But that isn't the case. And I know other pastors who have done the same thing by owning up to their failures, and honoring God's grace period.


I'm grateful for the grace of God that saved my ministry and my marriage. I'll celebrate three years of freedom on October 16 (2006). I'm by no means perfect or cured, but I've responded to God's grace, so I carefully and prayerfully live this journey with a deep awareness of my own frailty in this area, never wanting to head back down that path.

I'm more certain than ever that God takes no pleasure in seeing a ministry or a family destroyed and the church publicly embarrassed by a pastor's porn habit. That's why he offers His grace in our most desperate time of need. God may not be calling you to share your story as publicly as I have, but he is calling you to respond during this time of grace. My prayer is that you won't wait any longer.

"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Proverbs 28:13

"Where a man's wound is that is where his genius will be. Where his wounds lie there he finds his gift to the community." – Robert Bly

Courage,


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