

The Cycle of Addiction – Dan Hitz

This article is the third in a series adapted from our new teaching series Escaping the Dungeon of Porn. This class can be taught in men's groups, Sunday school classes and Saturday seminars. If you are interested in hosting an "Escaping the Dungeon of Porn" class at your church, call Reconciliation Ministries at 586.739.5114. Much of this article was adapted from Falling Forward, The Pursuit of Sexual Purity, Craig Lockwood, Desert Stream Press, Grandview, MO, 2000.



Temptations and failures often happen in cycles.

When Satan tempted Jesus after his forty-day fast and was unable to make him sin, Satan "left him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13 NIV). Men struggling with sexual addiction often vacillate between a period of relative freedom and extreme failure. Times of holy determination may be short lived – broken by a nosedive heart first into the pit of despair. This article provides insights into the addictive cycle, exploring the escalation into sin and the desolation of its

aftermath. Understanding the addictive cycle helps the struggler learn to break free of the usual patterns and begin to walk a new pathway of freedom. This article focuses on the addictive cycle from the perspective of a male sexual addict, although it is very similar for all types of addictions.

We live in a world of sensuality and temptation. Wounds and unresolved issues pierce our hearts and cause pain. In an effort to avoid the pain, addicts have learned to shut off their hearts and lose touch with the source of their pain. The head separates from the heart where a callous *shame core* develops. Because the addict has learned to medicate himself through sin, he never learns to express emotions properly. He is afraid of true intimacy which requires an open heart. External masks keep people from seeing the true self and he becomes an expert at running from pain. An addict can exist in this state for a long time while numbness and stress build simultaneously.



Preoccupation Stage – Intense Sexual Pressure When something happens in the addict's life that pierces his heart and penetrates his shame core, he begins to feel his suppressed pain and the cycle begins. The addict subconsciously begins to think of ways to "medicate" the pain and avoid it. Sexual pressure builds and looks for an escape valve. Mental images begin to bombard the addict as he begins to think about sex and gratification without actually acting out. He may be remembering "the good ol' days" and wondering how close he can get to the cliff without falling off. Adrenaline now starts to enter his bloodstream as the focus continues to shift from pain to the "solution".

Interventions are still very possible during the preoccupation stage if the addict makes an effort to implement them. The most important thing he can do is to recognize what is happening and call someone who is familiar with his struggle. Fully confessing the temptations and desires to an accountability partner helps bring the struggle into the light. It is important to discuss the trigger – the event that started the addictive cycle – and learn proper ways to handle the emotional situation. The triggering event may not be resolved, but talking to a trusted brother will help the addict navigate through his emotions successfully and avoid sexual self-medication.

Rationalizations and Excuses During the next stage of the addictive cycle, the addict begins to “create reasons” – *rationalizations* – why his illicit sexual behavior is really okay. He may tell himself, “If my wife would put out more, I wouldn’t be in this mess” or “If I just have one little look and masturbate, I’ll be able to get some sleep”. Adrenaline continues to enter their bloodstream. The addict talks himself into believing his own rationalizations paving the way for the actual behaviors. Tunnel vision begins to develop.

Interventions become less possible as the addict’s rationalizations become stronger. It is critical that the addict immediately removes himself from temptations and calls his accountability partner. The rationalizations must be replaced by Biblical truths. The accountability partner can help the addict look at his rationalizations to see where his vulnerability lies.

Rituals – Acting Out During the next phase of the additive cycle, the addict moves from thinking to doing. No full sexual encounter occurs; however, he engages in high risk behavior that opens the door for the encounter. He may lock his office door and look at “eye candy” on the Internet or intentionally pick a fight with his wife, storm out of the house, and go for a drive in the bad section of town to “cool off”. Addicts often set themselves up for further pressure by creating high risk situations or self-sabotaging careers or relationships. Such actions increase the likelihood of failure. Ritualizations further dilute the truth and thoughts of consequences “disappear”. The addict’s heart is racing, and tunnel vision has reduced his thoughts to a single focus.



Unless there is a miracle at this stage in the addictive cycle, failure is almost inevitable. The addict must immediately remove himself from the high risk situation and call for help. The accountability partner can help him realize what he stands to lose from his high risk behavior and arrange for further intervention.

Sexual Act is Committed In the next stage of the addictive cycle, the sexual act is committed. In his book *Falling Forward*, Craig Lockwood defines the sexual act as “a compulsive action with person, place, or thing which normally ends in orgasm”. The addict’s denial and rationalizations give way to a stunned reality.

Life Damaging Consequences In this stage, the addict recognizes some of the life damaging consequences to his sin. His primary relationships may be destroyed. He may have developed HIV or some other STD. If he is honest with himself, he will realize that his life is out of control. In the downward spiral of the cycle, denial is shattered by guilt, despair, and isolation. The addict’s new guilt and despair produces contempt for himself and others. Self contempt “confirms” that he is hopeless. Contempt for others produces anger at God for “not stopping him” and envy towards those who are successful. The shame core in his heart grows stronger.



Interventions are slightly more possible at this point due to his loss of denial. Although the interventions cannot undue what has just happened, they can help to prevent future sexual failures and begin to restore the addict's foundation. The support system in the struggler's life can help him to view the consequences of his sin as an incentive to overcome. The addict must choose to commit to full repentance and accountability to his support system and spiritual authorities.

The Resolution Stage During the resolution stage, the addict feels terrible about what he has done and vows once more “never to do it again”. He is now faced with two choices. He can choose to tell someone and seek external help in his recovery, or he can rationalize his decision not to tell anyone and go it alone. The later choice only serves to strengthen his denial and self-protective walls, further perpetuating the addictive cycle. He will experience a period of “victory” as his resolution holds temporarily and his shame core is hidden behind self-protective walls. This type of victory is always short lived. He has set himself up for the entire cycle to begin all over again.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13 NIV) No matter where someone is in the addictive cycle, God can intervene – if the addict lets Him. He must choose to be honest about his struggle and reach out for help. Freedom is available for all. One of our ministry team leaders made a profound statement during a teaching when he said, “Every leader has a day when they acted out for the last time.” Many on the leadership team were hardcore addicts. Breaking the addictive cycle wasn't easy, but they did it. Anyone who has learned to self-medicate their pain has become addicted to that medication. They will go through withdrawals. They will also have to learn to handle the emotional pressures that they have ignored for many years. However, they “can do all things through Christ who strengthens them”. As they choose to forsake their sin, they will become more in tune to the mind of Christ. He will lead them through their trials to victory.



*If you have a loved one who is a sexual addict, you will need help as well. Confide in the pastoral care staff at your church. Reconciliation Ministries is available to help. You will need someone to walk with you and help you learn proper boundaries and expectations. You will also need to deal with your own hurts and sense of loss. If you are a sexual addict, don't try to walk into victory on your own. You need the body of Christ. James 5:16 reads, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” Inform the pastoral care staff at your church that you need help. Reconciliation Ministries has many options to help you overcome sexual addiction. **Religiosity will not set you free – true repentance and gut wrenching honesty will.** Recovery from sexual addiction does not happen overnight, but by taking one step at a time you can overcome.*

If you or someone you know is struggling with sexual sin, help is available. Call Reconciliation Ministries at 586.739.5114 and ask about our upcoming *Living Waters* program, or our *Escaping the Dungeons of Porn* seminar.

If you would like more information about Reconciliation Ministries of Michigan, or any of the ministries we offer, visit us on the internet at www.recmin.org, or call (586) 739-5114. You may also e-mail us at info@recmin.org. All correspondence will be kept strictly confidential.

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