

REROUTE | REWIRE | RENEW

PSALM 37:4: DELIGHT YOURSELF IN THE LORD, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU THE TRUEST DESIRES OF YOUR HEART.

There is a way of freedom from addiction that involves transformation by the Holy Spirit and change through the brain mechanics God designed into us. The following phrase summarizes this plan: re-route, rewire, and renew.

Here is how the **re-route, rewire, and renew** plan works:

First, decide that this is ultimately not who you are meant to be. It is okay to be tempted. We are 100% forgiven and pardoned for our human weakness. But God has designed us to learn how to walk in joyful alignment with him – enjoying creation at peace with yourself and others. He has not made us to be slaves to our appetites or to worship the human body.

Second, admit, that this is a strong and common addiction and that unwinding yourself from it will take time and God's grace.

Third, accept God's mercy for your sinfulness. If you are a Christian, you are beloved by God, forgiven and totally redeemed in Jesus right now. If you are not a Christian, you are invited to ask the God of all Creation to give you his grace through his son Jesus. God gives us his peace and Jesus' own perfect blueprint for aligned living. His sexual purity is ours to live. Jesus' character lives in us by the Holy Spirit and we can learn to walk in that truth. (See article on Imputed Righteousness and Jesus' Perfect Blueprint)

Freedom from pornography is an indispensable, lifelong journey that you will never regret. I am 100% convinced that we will all look back on these days and thank our Father in heaven for the opportunity to learn about him, his world, and ourselves in this classroom-crucible called mortal life. Here is my recommended practices to bring habitual freedom:

REROUTE

Rerouting is key because the stimulus may never change. The urge to lust and to make the human body an outlet may remain as strong as it ever was this side of restored creation. The things that are broken about us and our urges are often very deep. There is likely repeated behavior. There may be trauma and other biological factors. But here is the key point I want you to get – don't get caught up in making the stimulus go away. It may wane over time. The constant nagging of mine certainly has, or it may not. The key is going to be about what you do with it next.

I am inviting you to make a new path. Let's try a word picture: Imagine you are standing in front a huge green field. In front of you is the exact same stimulus-to-payoff pathway you have frequently taken. Consequently, the ground of this path is pounded hard into packed soil. Grass is non-existent on this path as you have walked it over and over. But, the grass around the path is tall and green. The brain is a like that – it likes familiar paths because they translate into quick thinking reactions that in some cases may save your life. In the case of pornography and masturbation release, there is very likely a well-worn neural pathway. We get excited by an idea or image that begins to build an adrenaline rush and the desire for the same dopamine payoff. One may, at first, fight back or decline, but the well-worn path keeps calling. Taking the known journey just further packs that stimulus-payoff pathway harder into the ground. But there is another way.

Instead of denying those feelings or thoughts – I suggest you look right at them with Jesus, identify them, talk to them, and in this way – bring them into your pre-frontal cortex. Here is what is going on in your brain during one of these temptation to pornography-use moments. Your brain is retreating into the middle brain where you mostly process feelings. This is sometimes called the limbic, old, or animal brain. It simply means this is where you make fast, fight or flight, emotion-based decisions. The front of your brain, called your pre-frontal cortex is where you make thoughtful, executive decisions. It's the part of the brain where might see things from somebody else's perspective or be able to consider the long range implication of decisions. The middle brain screams go, run, act! The pre-frontal brain says, slow down, consider, and make wise choices. On our pathway to freedom, we want to get our actions connected back into the front of the brain –asap.

It does not mean the temptation will go away once you are thinking rightly. It DOES mean if you can slow down and engage your front-brain, you can choose another path. You can choose in that hard moment to candidly consider your next steps. You can think about who you are and who God is. And you can take a new path to a new payoff – by not merely responding to stimuli as a needs based animal but as human learning to delight in the LORD. This is the beginning of a whole new path.

REWIRE

Your brain loves to REWIRE itself. At night while we are sleeping it sends out these fantastic little machines called microglial cells and they travel among your neurons and axons checking connections – think of them as custodians out maintaining pathways. When they perceive well-worn pathways – they make sure all those quick thinking connections are well-established and strong. When discover new pathways – they start to reinforce them.

Now listen to this, when they start finding unused pathways – they start scrubbing away those connections. Just let that sink in. When your brain starts seeing you make new stimulus to payoff connections it starts prioritizing the new pathways and scrubbing the old. This literally means that by new habituation, rooted in new identity and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can begin to rewire our brains.

In this case, let me be very clear, I think anybody, non-Christian or Christian alike can take this course of action and begin to rewire the brain. But only the believer can lean into their known and unchangeable identity with Christ and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Paul says in I Corinthians 10:13, “no temptation but that which is common to being a human being has come over you” – so when temptations come on strong, stop and turn to God in Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Truthfully, I can’t imagine this journey being successful or the same to for me without these fundamental truths at the center. When I fail in any way to live aligned– I recall, I am Jesus’ always and forever. I am safe and at peace with God (Rom. 5:1-11). I have in me the same power that raised Christ from dead (Rom. 8:11) and the Spirit never grows weary of me but delights in transforming me into his likeness (Rom 8:26-30)!

Let’s go back to our big green field. Hold this image in your mind especially when you are at the moment of making a decision about which path to walk. Walking the new path will reinforce that truth in your spirit and your brain! So it is both a spiritual and physical habit. Conversely, walking the old path will only reinforce a path you have been trying to scrub. Sometime people will tell me, “I just have to satisfy the need so I can think straight again.” This is not the helpful way to think right again. Because it only reinforces the stimulus to payoff connection again. It is a short sighted solution to right thinking.

Here is what to do instead, in that moment, be still, talk to Jesus and the Holy Spirit about what you are feeling, explain how difficult this is, and pray for peace of mind and for help. Remember who you are. Ask the Spirit to take your hand and walk with you down the new path. The pay-off may not be glorious every time or as initially powerful as sexual gratification, but rest assured – as you tread the new path, you reinforce all its connections and the old path begins to fill in with green grass. This will lead to the most satisfactory payoffs you can imagine – the joy of freedom and healthy sexuality.

RENEW

As I’ve said repeatedly, this does not mean the stimulus will go away. Many Christians have been disappointed to find that sin is still attractive to them (Rom. 7). But in this, do not be overly disappointed, for we may not be able to totally change the appeal of the stimulus but we CAN allow the Spirit to RENEW our minds (Rom 12:2).

In my years of counseling people about pornography addiction and in my own journey of finding habitual freedom, I have a lot of what I would just call “commiseration.” That is counselors, pastors, or mentors simply agreeing that it is hard and feeling the hardship alongside you. Now, don’t get me wrong, understanding and mutual confession is great! I have a dear friend with whom I have mutually confessed everything and keep short accounts. What I mean here is the tendency to only shake our heads together, extend forgiveness, be compassionate, and commiserate, but not offer a plan out of this addiction.

The problem, I think, may be in part that too much of our education for helping people with pornography has been about raw resistance instead of replacement. Look to the Psalm at the heading of this article. Psalm 37 says “Delight yourself” with the following qualifier “in the LORD. First I want you to see “delight” and this really means delightful pleasure! And then the result, that the LORD will meet the truest desires of your heart! Elsewhere the Psalmist declares, “At your right hand are pleasure forever!” (Psalm 16:11). The ultimate renewing of the mind is when the payoff of walking the new path (which is intimacy and joy aligned with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) way outshines the payoff of distorted sexual gratification. I think we all know from experience, the tactics of ‘look away resist, don’t touch, and deny” only work in fits and starts and longer seasons until something comes along and unsteadies our resolve. What we are talking about is not a just a stronger will but a renewed mind where the Joy of the Lord payoff truly replaces the satisfaction of appetite. This is not perfection, but it is meaningful change.

There it is a way that leads to a renewed mind in Jesus: set a new path, repent and restart when you fall down, keep flattening the grass as you rewire your brain. And fellow-traveler, I sincerely believe and have experienced myself, that over the days and years you will find you have found a true path of joyful freedom. My hope is that then you find freedom from this addiction, you too will commit to showing someone else the way...

HEALTHY NEXT STEPS

1

Pray. Talk to Jesus about it. This journey needs the bedrock of relationship with God. This all begins in the safety of Jesus' total and constant forgiveness. Even if you are not a Christian yet, I invite you to a simple prayer. "Jesus, if you are Lord of the universe and care for me, then I am asking for your help. Help me reroute, rewire, and renew my mind with you, amen."

2

Find a friend and confess. Confession simply means bringing things out into the light. God already knows us entirely. Shame thrives in the dark. Find somebody you trust, and just start letting it out. I bet you will find it to be the second most powerful thing you can do after turning your life toward Jesus.

3

Keep learning: Check out the resources at ichoosejesusinstead.com and get started on a new path.

I am with you and for you. I get it. And I can say with honesty and hope – there is a way out of this and into freedom.

Coram Deo,

Christian

