

RESCUE SKILLS



ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR
RESTORING
THE SEXUALLY BROKEN

DEEPAK REJU & JONATHAN D. HOLMES

Rescue Skills is the fruit of years of combined ministry. Reju and Holmes, who are skilled at their craft, offer robust, practical wisdom that flows from biblical truths and pastoral hearts. *Rescue Skills* serves as an invaluable guide, not only for helping those struggling with porn in particular, but also for bearing one another's burdens in general. I highly recommend this book for any disciple and disciple-maker.

—**Robert K. Cheong**, Pastor of Care and Counseling, Sojourn
Community Church, Louisville, Kentucky

Brothers and sisters! This book has the potential to not only change the way you offer ministry to women and men who battle sexual sin but to transform churches. Imagine what would happen if the body of Christ actively engaged in personal study of the gospel with a view toward application in discipleship to those bound up in sexual sin? Envision with me what would happen if the church embraced practical, on-the-ground ministry rather than merely talking about sexuality. *Rescue Skills* can powerfully encourage and equip you through the guidance of two experienced pastors who have written this book from years in the trenches of loving people.

—**Ellen Mary Dykas**, Women's Ministry Director, Harvest USA;
Author, *Toxic Relationships: Taking Refuge in Christ*

This is a hard book to endorse—there are just too many good things to say! Holmes and Reju know the questions the helper must ask, the excuses the struggler will offer, the inner struggles that define the porn user's world, the way to help that will actually make a difference. *Rescue Skills* somehow manages to teach compassion for those who dive into porn without being soft on their sin. It also brings refreshingly novel topics to the battle, including reviving the conscience, taking your body's struggle seriously, and appreciating rather than avoiding true beauty. *Rescue Skills* is the most realistic yet hope-filled book I've read on helping people with pornography.

—**Alasdair Groves**, Executive Director, Christian Counseling &
Educational Foundation

Compassionate, fresh, practical, convicting, and reproducible, *Rescue Skills* is the right book at the right time for those who are facing sexual brokenness

and the loved ones who are seeking to help them. Within these pages lies the aggregate wisdom of two pastor-practitioners—counseling leaders who have dedicated their lives to the skill and beauty of helping people to experience gospel liberation. Whether you are personally fighting for freedom or counseling those under attack, this book forms a new weapon in the arsenal to help win the war.

—**Dave Harvey**, President, Great Commission Collective; Author, *I Still Do: Growing Closer and Stronger through Life's Defining Moments*

Reju and Holmes give us page after page of wisdom—God's truth applied in practical ways to a widespread problem that all counselors and disciples face. It is gospel-infused, biblically driven, and church-based, yet filled with concrete steps and sprinkled with case examples from their counseling ministries. A rich, readable resource for every Christian who wants to help friends who are tempted by or enslaved to pornography.

—**Robert D. Jones**, Associate Pastor of Biblical Counseling, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Author, *Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem*

In *Rescue Skills*, Deepak and Jonathan set out to help counselors to become better helpers and disciples of men or women struggling with addiction, and this book certainly accomplishes that task. Each chapter is filled with solid, practical guidance that can be put into practice immediately—guidance that is consistently rooted in God's Word. This book is the perfect companion to *Rescue Plan!*

—**Kristin L. Kellen**, Assistant Professor of Biblical Counseling, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

The sin of pornography is a growing issue in the church. Knowing how to help someone in this situation can be daunting. *Rescue Skills* is a gift to the church. Biblical counselors Deepak Reju and Jonathan Holmes have meticulously written a biblical roadmap for those who are coming alongside someone who struggles with pornography.

Rescue Skills translates biblical theology into practice through the process of biblical discipleship. It teaches the reader how to grow in essential

skills, such as listening, asking heart-probing questions, and executing a biblical plan of action to give help and hope to the sexually broken.

The easy-to-read chapters illustrate real-life narratives and provide immediate guidance in how to navigate difficult conversations. The reader is encouraged to practice the skills right away by using the application questions and reflections at the end of each chapter.

This book is for church leaders and anyone who knows someone who is struggling with pornography. The reader will gain insight, wisdom, and encouragement to grow in their personal skills to be a better minister and friend to the sexually broken. I highly recommend this book!

—**Shannon McCoy**, Biblical Counseling Director, Valley Center
Community Church, Valley Center, California

Read this book and you will be better equipped to help those who are struggling with pornography. In short and practically applied chapters full of true-to-life examples, Deepak Reju and Jonathan Holmes have provided a highly useable resource for anyone who wants to help someone to escape from an addiction to porn. Refreshingly honest, biblically faithful, deeply realistic, and filled with the hope that only grace can bring, this is a book that pastors, counsellors, and friends will turn to again and again.

—**Steve Midgley**, Executive Director, Biblical Counselling UK; Senior
Minister, Christ Church, Cambridge

Rescue Skills offers the most comprehensive approach of any resource I have seen to equip counselors to offer wise, practical, biblical advice to people who indulge in pornography and other sexual sins. The authors are very specific and real about these struggles without being salacious. They strike an appropriate balance between addressing the heart and taking action to restrain the flesh. While the book specifically addresses sexual issues, most of its wisdom would apply to helping counselees with other besetting sins. My students and counselees will benefit from this resource.

—**Jim Newheiser**, Director of the Christian Counseling Program
and Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology, Reformed Theological
Seminary, Charlotte; Executive Director, The Institute for Biblical
Counseling and Discipleship

The scope of the church's porn problem is staggering. It's no wonder that the world mocks us as the porn industry seeks relentlessly to prove that Christ is a cuckold. We need many more disciplers equipped to lead strugglers away from sexual sin and into the gracious arms of Jesus. This book is a stockpile of necessary wisdom. As you read it, your arsenal will be filled with multidimensional tactics specific to the battle against porn. You will come away prepared to be a better friend, spouse, counselor, or pastor to the many men and women who desperately need wise care.

—**Jenny and Curtis Solomon**, Cofounders, Solomon SoulCare;
Authors, *Reclaim Your Marriage: Grace for Wives Who Have Been Hurt by Pornography* and *Redeem Your Marriage: Hope for Husbands Who Have Hurt through Pornography*

No other book I've read more clearly teaches churches the practical skills necessary to help those who are struggling with sexual sin. *Rescue Skills* is rich with stories that clarify how to wisely help both men and women. But it's not just a catalogue of biblical precision tools. Most of all, it is the merciful heart of our ultimate Rescuer, Jesus Christ, that is on display. Each page displays his gentle heart toward sinners, providing hope and motivation to the reader. This will be an indispensable resource for our church's counseling team going forward.

—**Tim St. John**, Associate Pastor, Lighthouse Community Church,
Torrance, California

What happens when two seasoned shepherds team up to write a guide to help us to disciple those who struggle to overcome sexual sin? We receive the hope-infused, grace-fueled, Christ-centered, and biblically faithful tool you hold in your hands. *Rescue Skills* is a gift to all who are motivated by love to come alongside others to carefully discern how to help them to get to the roots of their struggle, so that they may experience lasting transformation. This wisely crafted instrument, in the hands of gracious disciplers, is sure to help many to learn to walk in the victory of gospel-rooted obedience.

—**Paul Tautges**, Author, *Anxiety: Knowing God's Peace*; Senior Pastor, Cornerstone Community Church, Mayfield Heights, Ohio; Founder, Counseling One Another

Walking alongside people who are sexually broken can feel like a daunting task—their actions can confuse us; their underlying heart struggles can be hard to address. Within these pages, however, there is hope and help. Whether you are a formal counselor or an individual who wants to spur on a friend, *Rescue Skills* is packed full of biblical nourishment, methodological wisdom, and a wealth of encouragement to keep nurturing our own hearts as we help those around us. Accessible, practical, and dripping with grace—it's a book I'll undoubtedly be coming back to time and again.

—**Helen Thorne**, Director of Training and Resources, Biblical Counselling UK

Rescue Skills is a delightful combination of sound theology and practical instruction on how to improve our actual counseling methodology. Jonathan and Deepak are a special blessing to Christ's church because they are immersed in biblical truth and experienced in helping people with real-life struggles. This book will help you to grow in your understanding of the process of counseling. The gospel is the greatest rescue project ever. May our Redeemer help us to become more skilled in this life-giving and life-changing endeavor.

—**Steve Viars**, Pastor, Faith Church, Lafayette, Indiana; Author, *Overcoming Bitterness: Moving from Life's Greatest Hurts to a Life Filled with Joy*

Rescue Skills is an essential go-to for every pastor, church leader, small-group leader, caring friend, mentor, or counselor who desires to grow in their people-helping skills. And that's all of us. You will find this book incredibly helpful as you minister to people with a variety of struggles, not just the sexually broken. Developing and honing the art of wise caring takes time, patience, and practice. You will probably read this book with one specific person or situation in mind, but I think you will come back to it again and again to grow in proficiency as other needs arise. I recommend keeping *Rescue Skills*, and its companion volume, *Rescue Plan*, close at hand.

—**Greg Wilson**, Licensed Professional Counselor and Supervisor, Soul Care Associates; Coauthor, *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church*

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Scripture quotations from the New Testament use the ESV's alternate, footnoted translation of *adelphoi* ("brothers and sisters").

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

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In the counseling cases described throughout this book, names and identifying details have been changed to preserve anonymity.

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To our dear wives, Sarah and Jennifer,
who have stood beside us through thick and thin,
good times and bad.
Thank you for your love, patience and grace . . .
and for putting up with our many faults!

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INTRODUCTION: DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

MASTERS OF THEIR CRAFTS AT WORK

If you ever see gifted lawyers in a courtroom, you'll notice that they ask precise questions, follow careful lines of thinking, apply pressure at just the right moments, object when other lawyers are getting out ahead, and make persuasive speeches to the jury.

If you ever witness talented chefs in the kitchen, you'll see their creative use of ingredients, their mastery of the mechanics of making quality dough, their artistry in decorating a cake, and their expert use of kitchen tools and appliances to produce fresh pasta, sumptuous turkey, or delicious pie.

If you ever watch carpenters at work, you'll see them operating table saws and wood chisels, using nail guns, polishing and finishing the wood, and carving items with pinpoint precision and delicacy.

What do they have in common? Skills—the abilities they've learned and practiced in order to be good at their crafts. Taking the time to train and hone these necessary skills makes all the difference between an amateur and a world-class master.

If you're reading this book, you're in pursuit of skills that have eternal significance. You're an ambassador for Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:20) and a soldier in God's army (see Eph. 6:10–20). There is a war being waged for a believer's soul (see 1 Peter 2:11)—the soul of your friend who is struggling with pornography and masturbation. You want to know how to hone your skills so you can help in this war.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT A COFFEE SHOP

Imagine Tommy or Teresa meets up with you for a latte. You're sitting at the corner table of your local coffee shop. Tommy starts in: "My wife caught me looking at pornography last night. She's really mad, and I'm ashamed to even admit this to you." Or Teresa tells you, "I've been meaning to tell you this for a while—I'm really struggling. I've been reading erotic literature for the last two years, and a few months ago I started dabbling in pornography. Now it's overwhelming my life."

What do you say? How do you respond? Where do you go in the Bible? What questions do you ask? How do you probe his conscience? How do you help her with her guilt and shame? There are a thousand questions you could ask—and a thousand and one things you could do in response. But what's best and wisest for *this* moment and for *this* specific person?

If you're like most Christians, you're not sure what to say or do. When it comes to a conversation with a friend who is struggling sexually, the stakes are high. You're at the front lines of the battle against temptation. Don't be afraid! There is much you can do.

This is where we come in. We want to help you.

The art of loving wisely draws on many skills. Asking a good question. Probing a person's shame. Pressing hard at the right moment. Applying Scripture thoughtfully and lovingly. Inspiring hope and instilling a Christ-centered identity. Being sensitive to his conscience. These are just a few of the skills you need. This book will help you to develop and hone these skills to help people who are struggling with pornography.

We've written *Rescue Skills* for the helper and discipler—the person who sits in the trenches with a struggling friend. Our target audience is pastors, counselors, best friends, parents, small-group leaders, roommates, fellow church members, and really anyone who is coming alongside a friend who struggles with pornography. If you are a believer who is committed to fighting against sin, striving for faith, modeling Christlikeness, and providing hope, this book is for you.

If you're personally overrun with pornography, you're welcome to read this book. You'll get plenty out of it. You can also check out our resources list in the back to find books written specifically for you.

A quick note on the use of pronouns: We understand that porn addiction is a problem for both men and women, so we use both masculine and feminine pronouns throughout this book. Much of the content applies to both men and women, regardless of the specific pronoun we have chosen for a given section.

A CHALLENGE TO GROW IN YOUR SKILLS

As you read the pages ahead, our hope is not just that you will grow in head knowledge but that you will work at becoming better at helping and discipling others. You're an ambassador for the Lord Jesus to a friend who is sexually addicted. This book can help you to grow in asking thoughtful questions, probing the heart, ministering to guilt and shame, encouraging the weary, and so much more. Don't wait until you have read to the end. With each chapter, start practicing the skills right away. Make use of them in your very next conversation.

At the end of each chapter, there are reflection questions for you (the discipler) to consider and a practical step for you and your friend to take in the fight against sexual sin. Make use of these two bits of application. You'll get *much more* from this book if you do the application. Don't read to fill up your head. Show in what you do that faith plus action is the best combination (see James 2:20–23).

Keep in mind that no one likes to be a project. If your friend thinks you've turned him into a class assignment, that's a quick way to sour the relationship. If you show that you love him and are committed over the long run to his spiritual good, now *that's* the recipe for success. We're much more inclined to listen to someone who we know loves us and is acting for our good.

Introduction

God is working in your friend's life (see Phil. 2:13). The Spirit brings conviction and instills hope in desperate situations. Yet God uses means—like you, a loving friend—to accomplish his purposes (see 2 Cor. 5:18; Gal. 6:1). He uses you to talk, pray, ask questions, comfort, exhort, love, support, encourage, and do so many other things.

Are you ready to begin? Let's start with a few important reminders on what we're dealing with.

FOUNDATIONAL INFORMATION FROM *RESCUE PLAN*

This book is a companion to *Rescue Plan: Charting a Course to Restore Prisoners of Pornography*. Ideally you will read both books, since *Rescue Plan*

- lays important theological groundwork about porn addictions
- gives extensive help for understanding and battling the sin of masturbation
- explains how sexual struggles are similar and different for men and women
- shows how to counsel people with a variety of unique needs (teenagers, singles, those who are dating, married people)

Even if you're more interested in the skills than the plan, don't skip these important notes! They are the foundation for what lies ahead.

Although porn strugglers may not think of themselves as addicts, addiction marks their behavior. To help them, you need to understand the nature of addiction and the factors that make them most likely to act impulsively when they are tempted.

GOD'S VIEW OF ADDICTIONS

Our culture has a lot to say about what an addict is and is not. We want to be careful at the outset to think about addictions according to the Bible. After all, we're Christians—so we want God's Word

to define how we think about everything, including porn addictions. On the pages of Scripture are five concepts—voluntary slavery, double-mindedness, foolishness, idolatry, and disordered desires—that come alive as we describe the nature of addictions.

Voluntary Slavery

Samir makes a choice to sin—to look at pornography. It's just one time, but it awakens in him an appetite for more. After his guilt and shame over violating his conscience dissipates, Samir chooses to do it again, and again, and again. His body and heart crave more, the cravings grow and take over his life, and one day Samir ends up enslaved. One dumb choice leads to death, not life. One titillating moment leads to months of bondage to sexual sin.

Double-Mindedness

Jillian hates her sin and loves it. She fantasizes about having sex and reads erotic literature. She hates her sin the moment after the guilt and shame kick in. However, give it time, and the cravings resurface, her loneliness feels fierce, her heart longs again, and her body wants more. Her affections for the addiction show themselves again. In one breath she says, "I've got to stop," and, in the very next, "I want more! I deserve more!"

Foolishness

Addiction is marked by foolishness, which is described vividly throughout the book of Proverbs. Take Javier's case, for example. He's been hooked on porn and masturbation for five years. The sin has overtaken his life. He sleeps very little so he can get yet another fix. He goes to church, but he spurns wisdom, insight, and a godly life (see Prov. 1:7). His friends talk to him, but he's not open to correction (see 12:1); rather, he feels justified in his own mind that he is right (see 12:15). "You guys don't get what I've been going through," he thinks. He despises the good sense in his pastor's and best friend's words (see 23:9). He lacks sense (see 8:5). He's hasty (see 29:20), and he's prone to quarreling (see 20:3). His parents are at a loss as

to what to do. If given a chance, Javier will wound loved ones and friends (see 26:10). He will not turn from his evil desires (see 13:19). He returns to his porn and often repeats his porn-use habits, like a dog returning to its vomit (see 26:11).

Idolatry

An idol is anything strugglers worship over and above God (see Rom. 1:25). In the twenty-first century, they don't bow down to an idol in an Old Testament temple. The issue goes much deeper. There are idols at war in their hearts (see Ezek. 14:1–5), promising them power, adventure, affirmation, control, pleasure, recognition, significance, and happiness. Leah looks at porn, fantasizes, and masturbates because she wants to be loved and to have sex. Her idols are the gods of relationship (“I want a man”) and experience (“I want to be intimate”). She can't get what she wants in the real world, so she makes up a fantasy world to get what she wants.

Disordered Desires

The addicted heart has passions, desires, and cravings (see James 1:14–15; 4:1) that are more worldly than godly. God cherishes holiness and love; the addict uses others for his own selfish gain. God teaches us to be servant-hearted and patient; porn shapes the addict to be greedy and to get his desires satisfied. If a struggler is hungry for pleasure, he'll go online and find pornographic images or videos. If he wants affirmation, he'll find someone who will give it to him. If he wants a burger, he'll drive down to McDonald's. His behavior is ruled by his disordered cravings and desires. A love for true beauty—for what God loves—becomes secondary to the carnal cravings of an addict's heart.

THE FOUR INGREDIENTS OF GIVING IN TO TEMPTATION (THE 4 A'S)

Imagine Samir or Leah sitting in his or her bedroom at 11:32 on a Friday night. It's been a hard day at work—high-pressure deadlines

and a mean boss. Dating prospects and hopes for marriage are waning. As is typical, around 11 o'clock, self-pity starts to kick in, and by 11:45 the rationalizations begin: "God doesn't care." "You deserve something for your troubles." "It doesn't matter, God will forgive you."

What makes Samir or Leah act out in the moment? There are four active ingredients at work when an addict feels tempted and pursues porn—access, anonymity, appetite, and atheism.¹ The Four *As*. Take any one of these away and the act of looking at porn becomes harder.

Access

Long gone are the days when a man walked away from a newsstand with a pornographic magazine in a brown bag or walked into an adult store to buy a VHS or DVD. With the emergence of the Internet, everything has changed. For one thing, the Internet lowered the barrier of entry for women. The playing field has evened. Both men and women have free and open access to as much pornographic content as their hearts desire.

In the age of the Internet, access to online content is available virtually everywhere. That's a problem for addicts. Open access is dangerous for an addict's soul. An addict often can't resist giving in to the temptation. A phone with unlimited and unfettered access to the Internet is like a grenade in her pocket. If she's not careful, it will eventually explode.

The Internet does great good, but it also leads to great harm.

Anonymity

Addicts typically don't look at porn in a busy workroom or on the subway. They look at it alone, in their apartments, behind closed doors. They do it when no one else can see what they are doing.

Appetite

If an addict's idolatrous heart can secure access and anonymity, it satisfies his cravings and desires for more porn. Think of his sinful flesh as a dragon. If he feeds it, it never becomes satisfied. It just

wants more. Idolatry and disordered desires overrun a believer. His carnal cravings dethrone God and everything else in his life. Another way to describe addictions is as *desires that run amok*.

Atheism

Satan's goal is to get a struggler to doubt God's goodness and his love, just as he did with Adam and Eve. *Did God really say . . . ? Does God really love you? Will God really follow through?* If the devil can sow the seeds of doubt, he creates a momentary atheist. When an addict listens to Satan, she turns her back on God (see Ps. 14:1), and, not surprisingly, she'll fall back into looking at porn. She gives in to her battle with unbelief, even for just thirty seconds, because she's been fooled by sin yet again. Sin always overpromises and underdelivers.

PART 1

HELPER SKILLS

To be effective in your love for your struggling friend, you'll need to grow in your skills as a discipler. Part 1 details important skills for you to master as a helper.

1

LISTENING WITH AN ACTIVE EAR

*Being heard is so close to being loved that for
the average person they are almost indistinguishable.*

—David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Hear and Be Heard*

*Know this, my beloved brothers and sisters:
let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*

—James 1:19

“Hi, you’re on the phone with Dr. Frasier Crane, and *I’m listening.*” This was the memorable line that Kelsey Grammar’s psychiatrist character famously said when callers phoned in to his radio show. Unfortunately, for the majority of Frasier’s callers, Frasier was doing *anything* but listening. From pestering his radio producer to occupying himself with his own troubles, Frasier’s listening was a bit of a sham.

Oftentimes we can be guilty of the same practice in our care and discipleship. A lot of nods and shakes of the head may seem to communicate that we are listening, but our minds are far from the people in front of us. We ask a question, only to formulate an answer to what we *think* will be the response. We offer answers to problems that show we have not fully tried to understand the struggler’s world. Or we interrupt strugglers mid-sentence, showing that what we say is more important to us than their comments.

The fact that people struggle to listen is nothing new. The word *listen* is used over fifteen hundred times in the Bible, and more often

than not the issue is that people do not listen.¹ The skill of listening is something we all can grow in. When you listen to others, remember that more is happening than the mere auditory reception of words.

WHO IS YOUR LISTENING ROLE MODEL?

Why do we listen? We listen because God listens to us. We mirror God when we pause and listen to others.

But truly God has listened;

he has attended to the voice of my prayer. (Ps. 66:19)

I love the LORD, because he has heard

my voice and my pleas for mercy.

Because he inclined his ear to me,

therefore I will call on him as long as I live. (Ps. 116:1–2)

Or think about how Christ carefully listens. For example, in John 4, a Samaritan woman comes to Jacob's well to get water at midday. They talk about living water, her sexual sin, and the need to worship in Spirit and truth. Christ hears her when she speaks to her deepest needs (for a Savior) and her greatest shame (sexual sin with multiple men). He listens to all of it—her misunderstandings, her shame, her theological inquiries, and much more. And he responds with gentleness, honesty, theological truth, and love.

In addition to imitating Christ (who is the *best* of all listeners), there are many good reasons why a Christian *should* carefully listen. We pay attention to struggling believers because it helps us to understand their troubles. As we listen, we build more comprehensive pictures of these people's lives. We take note of their desires, frustrations, and suffering, because doing so communicates love and concern and models grace and patience.

The stark contrast is the proverbial fool. The fool is the epitome of a *horrible* listener.

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing his opinion. (Prov. 18:2)

If one gives an answer before he hears,
it is his folly and shame. (Prov. 18:13)

Do you see a man who is hasty in his words?
There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Prov. 29:20)

The biblical picture of the fool is one who doesn't listen and understand but speaks too quickly. He is impulsive. He answers before he hears. He doesn't take the time to hear and then speak. In Proverbs 18:2, the fool finds pleasure *only* in saying what he wants to say. In verse 13, because of his impulsive speech that lacks understanding, he is deemed foolish and shameful. Or, as one commentator put it, "stupid and a disgrace."²

Who are you more like when it comes to listening—Christ or the fool? Are you good at it, or are you lazy and driven by your agenda? Do you struggle to listen well? Or are you humble enough to admit you are a poor listener?

WHAT KIND OF LISTENER ARE YOU— GOOD, BAD, OR MEDIOCRE?

It's clear—listening is both difficult and Christlike. How good or bad of a listener are you? Take the listening test—rate yourself on a scale of one to ten. *One* is the worst listener on the planet. *Ten* is the best listener in the entire universe. Take a moment, get a number in your mind, and then write it down below.

Rate yourself: I am ____ out of 10.

Here's what to do with this number: Go and talk with someone who knows you really well. Ask her to rate you as a listener, and get her to explain *why* she ranked you the way she did. For example, you

self-identify as an 8, but your spouse or parent or best friend says you are a 3. You're surprised. So you ask, "I ranked myself as an 8, but you gave me a 3. Why did you rank me that low?" Be humble enough to hear her explanation. If you hear and own what she is saying, you'll grow as a listener. We promise. But don't ask for help if you are *not* humble enough to receive feedback and make adjustments.

"True listening wars against the entrenched selfishness of the human heart. The listening heart is one that seeks to give, to learn, to welcome, to serve. In a small but real way, listening imitates the self-emptying act of Jesus, who voluntarily released his claims on ruling in order to serve and give his life. The listening heart strives to put away control, all the ways we can manipulate a conversation for our gain. It is able to stop in the middle of a thought and say, 'You're right.' . . . The listening heart seeks to be present, to be focused on something other than itself and to give its attention away."

—Adam McHugh³

Now imagine Andy comes to you after several years of struggle and tells you his story. He's watching pornography two or three times a day. He's got access through his smartphone and has not locked it down by using available restrictions. He broke up with his girlfriend recently, and, to mask the pain, he has plunged into pornography more than ever. He's broken over his sin but also blind to a lot of foolish mistakes he's making. He's got too much access, and you know you need to help him to build restrictions into his phone and to build self-discipline in his thought life.

Here's the kicker, though—as you meet with Andy for lunch, he tells you his story for fifty minutes nonstop. No breathers. No pauses. He just keeps talking *at* you, not *with* you. How would you do in listening to him? At the forty-fifth minute, would your mind be wandering, or could you stick with it? Would you keep listening as diligently as you did in the first few minutes? Rate yourself again on the same scale as before: *one* (worst listener) to *ten* (best listener).

Rate yourself: After forty-five minutes of listening to Andy, I would rate myself ____ out of 10.

Listening is hard work, especially the longer the conversation goes. Are you willing to do the hard work?

WHAT SHOULD YOU LISTEN FOR?

With that being said, what should we be listening for? What can we tune our ears toward? Let's take the Four *As* and see where we need to pay special attention.

Access

- Where does he access his pornography?
- What excuses does she give for leaving outlets for pornography unprotected and unaccountable?
- When you offer accountability measures as a way toward purity, does he offer half-hearted rationalizations? How does he justify his sin?

Anonymity

- Who is mentioned in his story? Who are the key people in his life?
- How connected or isolated is she? Who knows what is going on in her life?
- Has he ever disclosed this struggle to someone other than you? If so, what was the result?
- How long has she struggled with pornography without telling anyone?
- Has he realized that pornography isolates him from people?

Our friend Don says things like “I’m alone,” or “No one cares,” or “God has abandoned me.” This communicates his isolation.

A fellow church member, Gina, says, “I don’t need help” or “I can do it on my own.” Her deliberate pursuit of anonymity tells us

she is prideful and foolish, as no one can survive on her own in a fight against sexual sin.

Appetite

- How does she describe the drive toward pornography?
- Does he recognize the desires that ensnare his heart? Or is he ignorant of the war in his heart?
- Has she done any heart-level work to understand what happens within her in moments of temptation?

Listen for words that communicate her cravings—*want, desire, need, must have, look forward to, can't go without*, and so on.

Atheism

- Does she ever mention God in her struggle? Or does she leave him completely out of it?
- What's his functional view of God?
- Does she believe that God cares about her and her situation?
- Does he think God can change him? Or has he given up on God?
- What other doubts does he express about God?

Listening well involves asking questions and then sifting through answers. The answers are critical because they inform how you move forward. What would happen if a doctor began an operation without taking time to ask questions and listen for the answers? Such a dynamic could lead to serious injury and malpractice. The same holds true for us if we do not listen well. We can offer ill-timed advice or biblically misleading counsel when we fail to listen first.

Every time people speak to us, they are bearing witness and testimony to what is in their hearts (see Prov. 4:23; Luke 6:43–45). Therefore, every piece of content we hear is important, though some details and pieces of information may be *less* important than others. God knows that listening is something we struggle with, which is why he admonishes us to “be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to

anger” (James 1:19). It’s commonly observed that God created us with one mouth and two ears. He did that to remind us of the ratio of speaking to listening that we are to engage in.

A *confessional* view of God is an understanding of who God is according to how he reveals himself in his Word. A *functional* view of God is what we think about God, but it’s rooted in assumptions and beliefs that are based on education, experience, or worldly wisdom rather than God’s Word. For example, Hector knows the Bible says God loves him, but Hector’s functional view of God is that the Lord doesn’t love him, maybe even dislikes him, because Hector hasn’t overcome his addiction.

PRACTICAL SKILLS WHEN LISTENING

Here are a few additional ways you can demonstrate love as you listen to others tell their stories.

Listen with your posture. Are you attentive? Do you have attentive body language—an open and relational posture rather than a closed one? Squarely face the other person. Lean in and show interest with your body language. Do not become preoccupied with other things, such as taking notes, checking your phone, or looking at the clock.

Listen with your eyes. Maintain eye contact. Look the other person in the eyes. This shows that you are engaged with him.

Listen with your mind. Are you focused on the other person, or do you zone out? Are you easily distracted?

Look for breaks in eye contact. Sometimes a break in eye contact communicates shame or guilt. The last time that I (Jonathan) talked to a struggler, I asked him to look up at me, and he said he couldn’t: “I’m too ashamed of what I’ve done.”

Helper Skills

Pay attention to nonverbal communication. How does the other person present to you—anxious, angry, ashamed, disappointed? Can you see this in her body posture or her facial expressions? Is she folding her hands across her chest, or is she curled up in her seat? Does she appear dejected or despairing? Does she seem fidgety?

Reflect: How well do you listen, and how can you grow in this area? What can you do in your next conversation to get better? For example, should you put your cell phone out of reach so you don't get distracted?

Act: After your next meeting, talk about how you and your friend did at listening to each other. In Christ, with humility and love, give each other feedback and help each other to grow.