

Help for the Sexual Addict: discerning between weakness and sin

To help people struggling with sexual addiction, we need to help them not only repent for the sin of their behavior, but also the sin of denying their limitations as humans and their need for God. In order to do this, they will need to see and accept weakness with an understanding that God does not despise this in them, but rather has great compassion.

The worksheet below is designed to help you discern the difference between sin and weakness so you can point others to the appropriate truth and solution in Christ. As you better understand this for yourself, you will be better equipped to help sexual addicts turn to God with a deep desire to change because they know he loves them and is the only Way, Truth, and Life worth having.

Sexual Addiction: discerning between weakness and sin

Look at the “common phrases” of addiction in the table below and then choose which “common sins” and “common weaknesses” apply to each phrase. You can use as many sins or weaknesses from each list as you think are appropriate to fill in the chart. Once you’ve evaluated each phrase, answer the reflection questions based on your interpretations of each phrase*:

Common Sins

- Pride
- Anger
- Lust
- Fear
- Unbelief
- Selfishness
- Self-pity
- Cowardice
- Self-justification
- Hopelessness
- Slander/blaming/accusing
- Deceitfulness/believing lies over truth
- Minimizing/denial

Common Weaknesses

- Vulnerable to pain
- Inability to fix problem and only manage it
- Possibility of rejection
- Not in control/powerless
- Failing personal standards
- Feeling physically unwell (tired, hungry, etc.)
- Emotions that feel weak:
 - Feeling judged
 - Feeling lonely
 - Feeling afraid
 - Feeling ashamed

*An answer key has been provided below to check your interpretations.

Common phrases of addiction	What are the sinful beliefs and attitudes behind this comment?	What weaknesses might this person be trying to deny in this comment?
<i>Everyone looks at porn.</i>	Deceitfulness/believing lies over truth/ minimizing/denial, Self-justification	Inability to fix problem and only manage it, feels judged
<i>Sin is sin.</i>		
<i>Nobody in the church understands me.</i>		Feeling lonely, possibility of rejection
<i>I can't talk about it. It's too embarrassing.</i>		Feeling ashamed, vulnerable to pain, possibility of rejection
<i>I can never tell my wife, it will hurt her too much.</i>	Cowardice, pride, selfishness, Deceitfulness/ believing lies over truth/ minimizing/denial	
<i>I only do it once a month.</i>		
<i>God hasn't helped me!</i>	Anger, blame, self-pity, unbelief	
<i>I've tried everything. I'll never change.</i>		Inability to fix problem and only manage, feeling ashamed
<i>What's wrong with me, why do I do this?</i>		Failing personal standards, feeling ashamed, feeling afraid
<i>Why won't God just take this from me?</i>		
<i>Add your own phrase</i>		

Reflection questions:

1. How is a person making this statement likely deceived?
2. How would you address this statement in truth and love?

Answer Key

Common phrases of addiction	What are the sinful beliefs and attitudes behind this comment?	What weaknesses might this person be trying to deny in this comment?
<i>Everyone looks at porn.</i>	Deceitfulness/believing lies over truth/ minimizing/ denial, Self-justification	Inability to fix problem and only manage it, feels judged
<i>Sin is sin.</i>	Self-justification	Feeling judged
<i>Nobody in the church understands me.</i>	Self-pity, pride	Feeling lonely, possibility of rejection
<i>I can't talk about it. It's too embarrassing.</i>	Pride, cowardice/fear	Feeling ashamed, vulnerable to pain, possibility of rejection
<i>I can never tell my wife, it will hurt her too much.</i>	Cowardice, pride, selfishness, Deceitfulness/ believing lies over truth/ minimizing/ denial	Feeling ashamed, feeling afraid, failing personal standards, possibility of rejection
<i>I only do it once a month.</i>	Deceitfulness/believing lies over truth/ minimizing/ denial, self justifying	Inability to fix problem and only manage it, not in control/powerless
<i>God hasn't helped me!</i>	Anger, blame, self-pity, unbelief	Not in control/powerless
<i>I've tried everything. I'll never change.</i>	Hopelessness, unbelief, self-pity	Inability to fix problem and only manage, feeling ashamed
<i>What's wrong with me, why do I do this?</i>	Self-pity, pride, hopelessness	Failing personal standards, feeling ashamed, feeling afraid
<i>Why won't God just take this from me?</i>	Deceitfulness/believing lies over truth/ minimizing/ denial, Hopelessness	Inability to fix problem and only manage, vulnerability to pain, not in control/powerless

Reflection questions sample answer: *Everybody looks at porn.*

1. How is a person making this statement likely deceived?

I have met with Jack several times, and even though he admits he has a problem with porn, when he's confronted with his shame or how his problem has hurt others, he dismisses it by saying that "everyone looks at porn." He agrees that God loves him, but doesn't understand that his sin hurts God, because he knows that if he repents of his sin, God will forgive him. When I point out that God is holy, and that it is in his holiness he hates sin because sin destroys us, Jack still feels that God knows he's doing his best.

2. How would you address this statement in truth and love?

To start bridging this gap, it will be necessary to expose to Jack what bothers him most about his porn use. We will likely discover that his shame and discomfort have little to do with offense to God or damage to others, but is centered on his own inability to solve this issue himself. He often feels judged by others because he judges himself for not being able to get it under control. Because being weak in this way is the real problem in his eyes, any sin that covers this up (denial, minimizing, etc.) seems like a friend to him. Confronting in love means challenging the belief that he should just handle it. Asking questions like, "How do you feel after giving into this temptation? What would God want for you - to be free or feel trapped?" can start to help Jack to admit that he is helpless to change this in a lasting way apart from Jesus. As Jack starts to see that his sin issue is primarily about believing lies about himself and God, he will be able to look at his porn use in a new way and at God who can do what Jack never could. Instead of feeling shame about weakness, he can feel joy for God's care and sufficiency in his times of need. Hebrews 4:14-16 can be an important truth that reminds Jack of how we can trust Jesus to fight and win our battles for us because he understands our weakness, and yet is our holy God who never fails and has already won. As I speak about God's love and power, it's necessary to communicate how I have experienced change in my own life with regard to sexual sin. This acknowledges that "everybody" can be affected by sexual sin, but challenges the idea that "everybody" is stuck in it. It also humbly models boasting in weakness and invites Jack to do the same.