

GRAHAM HOOD | GARY KENT



THE HIDDEN BATTLE: **BREAKING FREE**



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THE HIDDEN BATTLE: BREAKING FREE

Have you ever struggled with a particularly stubborn habit? Are you struggling right now with a problem that just won't go away? Have you been defeated over and over again by some kind of addictive behavior? Perhaps you have failed many times. Maybe you've been very earnest in your efforts. You may even have tried religion. But you keep falling over the same old problem. You keep failing. And that is terribly frustrating.

There is hope. There is a solution you can hold onto.

This is the story of Graham Hood, told in his own words. It is a story of despair and hope, of extreme lows and eventual joy. It is a life-long journey, but Graham is never alone. By

following the same path to freedom, you, too, can rediscover true happiness and purpose for living.

GRAHAM'S STORY

My name is Graham Hood. I am a grateful believer in Jesus Christ and I struggle with porn addiction. I introduce myself in my Recovery Road twelve-step group by saying: “My name is Graham, my identity is in Jesus Christ, and my struggle is pornography.”

My addiction is not what defines me, but my relationship with Jesus does.

My struggle began in a five-metre aluminium caravan on a bush block south of Sydney when I was twelve years old. During my first year at high school, I contracted rheumatic fever and was confined to bed for 6 months. Both my

parents worked long hours and I was left alone from daybreak till after dark with nothing to do in this tin box we called home.

One day, I discovered a box of girly magazines in the wardrobe. It was the beginning of my fascination, and I fell immediately into a life-long addiction that would alter my destiny and the course of my life.

My story is not uncommon. I have researched porn addiction for the past twelve years and have found that more men than we realise battle with it. Most boys succumb as they are entering puberty. The resultant issues bring shame and guilt at the most formative time in their lives. This is how it was for me.

Not understanding what was happening to me, and feeling as filthy as anyone could, I seemed to be doomed to a life of depravity. I now understand that some twenty percent of consumers become addicted to porn. I was one of that twenty percent.

Pornography gripped my life immediately. It consumed me like a raging inferno and my every hour was spent in a quest for more and more. My education suffered and I became a truant from high school. I eventually left school at the age of just thirteen.

I was able to find employment straight away but spent a great deal of my income buying porn. My consumption demanded more and more money, so I began a life of petty theft. As a result, I had a criminal conviction by the time I was seventeen. My life was tattered and my dreams for the future faded as rapidly as my self-esteem. My passion for pornography led me next into a sex addiction, and I became a client of prostitutes and massage parlours.

I believed that getting married as soon as possible would normalise my life and that marriage and my wife would meet my desires. This was a very sad miscalculation. Despite remaining in the marriage for more than thirty years, the union was a disaster. My addiction guaranteed

its doom from the start.

My then-wife was aware of my obsession, but pretended that it would one day go away. It did not.

We had two beautiful daughters. I was a devoted father and provided well for my family. I was able to achieve my dream of having a wonderful career as an airline pilot. However, my perfect job became a further breeding ground for my habit. It took me away from my family, as I spent up to a week at a time in 5 star hotels around the country.

I was very lonely and my loneliness was the main trigger for my addiction. Years later, I wrote an article entitled “Lonely Men Watch Porn”. Other porn consumers reading the article agreed totally that this was also a trigger for them.

My early consumption of pornography was based mainly around magazines in plain brown paper wrappings, along with some super 8 movies

procured at great cost. However, my addiction really took wings with the advent of the Internet and the aptly named World Wide Web.

I am aware that the initial purpose of the WWW was military and its secondary purpose was driven by a global endemic desire for porn. The first commercial transactions ever carried out on the Internet were for the purchase of pornography. The word most often tapped out on a computer keyboard is SEX.

After buying our first computer, I was dragged into a dark world from which there seemed no escape. But I was still a devoted family man, and my children meant everything to me. I was their hero.

My darkest moment came when, while viewing porn upstairs in the study, I was horrified to notice the reflection of my twelve-year-old daughter in the screen. Unbeknown to me, she had been watching me watch it. The look on her face haunts me to this day and I crumpled into

a sobbing mess for two days. As a result of this terrible experience, I vowed never to watch porn ever again.

This vow was broken scarcely 48 hours later.

My dysfunctional marriage became toxic. Try as we might, we were unable to hold it all together, and after two separations and countless hours spent in counselling, eventually it failed. In the final weeks of our marriage, I felt like an unwanted houseguest in my own home. Four trips every week for my job meant sleeping in a strange bed every night, and my marriage bed felt the same way. It seemed that I did not belong anywhere, and I progressively sensed my identity slipping away.

Hopelessness overwhelmed me to such an extent that in 2006 I set about planning my suicide. The shed where I had taken to hiding out for most of my time at home seemed the best location. I convinced myself that the world and my family would be better off without me. Every two and

a half hours, an Australian man takes his life. I planned to become part of that number.

Just days before the date I had set for my final exit, I met someone destined to turn my life around. While operating a flight from Brisbane to Perth, I was obliged to stand with Michelle for some time. Immediately I felt a light shining brightly at the end of the dark tunnel I inhabited. Michelle and I felt ourselves in love within moments of that first meeting, and within days my life had turned from an ignominious end to a bright new beginning.

Several months before, as I had planned my suicide, I had questioned again and again what life was all about. What was the purpose? Why was I here?

Now, after a life of agnosticism and atheism, and with a new relationship beginning, I began to consider faith. The search for meaning brought me to a point where I believed that there must be a God. However, I still hated religion.

I believed, as I still do, that external, formal religion, without a transformation of heart and life, is the business of God conducted by men, and they do it very poorly. I have often thought that there is much about religion that God would hate, too. Too often, the lunacy of men has been called the will of God. This has done nothing to promote the view of the true God of love and self-sacrifice whom I now worship.

With the end of my first marriage, the abandonment of my suicide plans and the beginning of a new life with Michelle, I was able to give up porn cold turkey. That eleventh-hour meeting had changed my destiny and ultimately developed into a very happy marriage. I also found faith and the love of Jesus.

Michelle was herself a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. We knew that God had brought us—two broken people—together for a purpose. We began a ministry, Mission Serenity, that is designed to restore lives broken by addiction and childhood sexual abuse. Our work includes

a twelve-step recovery series we call Recovery Road and a couples' relationship restoration program we call Second Chances.

God has blessed these programs from the beginning. We have seen over 300 couples step back from the brink of divorce, and the number increases every time we run a couples' retreat weekend at our property in northern New South Wales, Australia. Our testimonies, books and television appearances have enabled us to take our message to an even wider audience.

The marriage weekends have given us a distinct understanding of the hurdles that couples need to clear in order to achieve a happy marriage. When diligently applied, relatively simple fixes can remove the fog of despair and shine a light on a very bright future.

But our life together has not been without setbacks. Twice, in 2012 and 2016, I stumbled briefly back into my porn addiction. I could not have felt worse. I knew I had to tell

Michelle, and I learned a huge lesson each time I confessed to her.

The first time, in 2012, I broached the subject with great fear and trepidation about her response. A voice whispered in one ear, telling me to keep it to myself. “No harm has been done,” said the voice, “and if you tell her, she will hate you and your marriage will be over.” In the other ear was a still, small voice telling me that I knew what I had to do.

I asked her to sit with me, and I pre-empted my confession by saying that what I was about to tell her could destroy our relationship. I began to cry. Her face warmed with the flush of compassion and she calmly asked me what the problem was.

I told her that while on an overnight trip a few weeks earlier I had stumbled and I could not carry the burden any more.

Her initial response was, “Are you OK,

sweetie?” I replied that I could not feel any worse. Then she asked if it was anything she had done. I reminded her that I had been struggling with this issue since I was twelve, and it had nothing to do with the way she loved me. Then came the words that plunged a dagger into the forces of evil that were seeking to destroy our relationship: “What can I do to help you?”

It was then that I saw the face of Jesus. I felt His compassion through her, and she became an angel in my struggle. Michelle and I formed a closer-knit team that day. We were going to fight this together. I was not alone.

I had tried everything to beat this affliction, and had realised previously that my own puny power was never going to cut it. I now understood the same truth in a different and more powerful way. I had to surrender completely to a power greater than I, a power so strong that it had driven a man I had never met to give up His life for me. Jesus died the worst possible death on a cross two millennia ago so that I, a filthy porn addict, could

have a second chance. Now, He had my attention.

In 2016, while on a trip to New Zealand to speak to other men about porn addiction, I was smacked again. As soon as I returned home, I had to tell Michelle. Her reaction was different. She seemed shocked and stunned. I asked if she was OK, and she cried as she told me that this felt different. Desperate to know what she was feeling I asked her to talk it through with me and she did.

It was a great insight that I will always be grateful for. She told me that every time I fell to “my stuff” it brought up “her stuff”. Prior to our meeting, she had lived for thirty years in an abusive and loveless relationship with a man who put her down at every opportunity in an effort to control her. He had never paid her a compliment. The most beautiful woman I have ever met was told that she was ugly and that she was lucky that anyone would have her at all. This was only a small fraction of the abuse dealt out to her over thirty years. She wondered whether

it was possible that I was stumbling because she was not good enough for me: that she was ugly, and no match for the twisted, contorted women I was watching on my laptop.

That night I truly heard her pain. While it was a result of years of sustained abuse and was not directed primarily at me, my stumble had driven a nail into her hand too.

As we hugged before attempting to drift into sleep, she asked me a question: “You have always said that you would take a bullet for me.” I replied, “Absolutely and without question.”

“Well, if you would take a bullet for me, can you stop watching porn for me?”

It hit me like a freight train and it worked.

So where does someone like me go for the healing I need? There is only one place: to the Cross. I have to bathe in the grace, understanding and compassion that is the Cross of Jesus. He

died to give me the greatest opportunity ever: a second chance at eternal life in a sinless world. Was I really going to mess that up?

Today, as I surrender minute by minute to the power of the Holy Spirit in my life, I take great comfort in this Bible verse: “For he who overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his Father and he will be My son” (Revelation 21:7).

Can there ever be a greater promise of hope than this?

That is my story. It is a story that will extend beyond this life. Every day, my identity is in Jesus Christ and my struggle is pornography. I cling to Jesus and His promises. It is He who provides the strength.

Now I want to discuss the problem of addiction and Jesus’ solution in more detail.

THE PROBLEM

My experience and research show clearly that the driving force behind any addiction and relationship breakdown is a feeling of rejection and not being loved. I strongly believe that we were born to love and to be loved; that the absence—or the perceived absence—of love is the driving force behind most of the societal dysfunction we face in our modern world.

If we are to understand the essence of good and evil and the forces that drive these two opposing choices, then we must see that the breakdown of the family is a huge part of the battle offensive. Marriage is the institution that binds the concept of family and community. Destroy marriage, and you destroy the family, then the community and the society that is built around it. Today, marriage has never been under greater attack. When the family is split, the children are often left without one of the parents who provide the balance required for stability and growth.

Single parent families are now very common; in fact, there is often an expectation that there will be only one parent primarily involved in a child's upbringing. This flies in the face of what family is all about, and illustrates the gravity of the issues we now face. Children need to be members of a family that centres around the parents' relationship.

Many men will have a number of children to several different women, and this makes it impossible for them to take a full-time role in the lives of each of their children. This perpetuates and escalates the problem, as increasing numbers of children see this situation as normal.

We have seen that the best gift we can give our children is a happy marriage, because it makes them feel secure. They will sense how fortunate they are to live in a loving marriage with their parents. When the marriage breaks down, the parents compensate by over-indulging the children. This is creating a generation of self-obsessed and demanding children who will carry

this dysfunction into their own relationships.

You may wonder what this has to do with porn. It has a great deal. The two issues most often identified with marriage breakdowns are sex and finances.

Porn has distorted the understanding of intimacy. It promotes sex and not love. It purveys erotica and nothing else. Many people in relationships have stopped making love and have become insatiable seekers of sex. The contrast between making love and having sex is as stark as the difference between black and white. Making love is the culmination of a relationship built on friendship and commitment.

In the Hebrew language there are three different words that describe love. The word *Riyah* is a deep friendship that we often liken to someone being our soul mate. The second word is *Ahava*, which means a deep, abiding commitment. This is your confidence that there is no other person in the world you would rather be with. The third

word, *Dode*, is the erotic, sexual element of love.

Pastor Rob Bell describes the three different elements as flames. He talks about how the hottest and brightest flame is achieved when all three elements are combined. Song of Songs, in the very centre of the Bible, eloquently describes this union.

Pornography teaches us that life is all about sex: abusive and controlling, demeaning and debasing, void of friendship and commitment. Pastor Bell describes this as the reason that an affair often leaves us feeling empty, unfulfilled, guilty and ashamed.

Couples often credit porn for spicing up their sex lives. Really? Let's be honest. If you are reliving a porn scene in your mind when you are lying with your partner, then you have invited other people into the bedroom. That spells the eventual end of a relationship.

Today, statistics tell us that children as young as

three have been exposed to porn. Children are living with porn and it is distorting everything they should know about relationships. The youngest boy I have helped overcome a porn addiction was nine years old at the time. Tragically, porn is an integral part of the lives of school age kids. We can only imagine how this is affecting them. Young girls are thinking that the only way to have a relationship is to perform like a porn star, and young boys are so depressed about not being able to perform like a porn star that some have taken their own lives. We must also consider what the demand for more exciting forms of voyeurism is doing to the world.

The more you consume porn, the greater your need for more exciting and provocative images, as the material that got you high yesterday makes you yawn today. This demand is leading purveyors of porn to produce more and more degrading genres to meet demand. They will stop at nothing.

Sadly, there are few people in front of the camera

on a porn set who enjoy the experience; many are forced into the roles they play. What gets you off on your computer feeds a great demand for sexual slavery.

The reality is that porn is feeding an increasing incidence of marriage breakdown, suicide, depression, anxiety and societal dysfunction. Marriages, careers and lives are being shattered on the growing iceberg of pornography. Nothing sells like sex, and the producers are making billions of dollars from it.

Porn is a drug addiction as much as ice or cocaine. The visual stimulus activates the brain to produce excess dopamine, endorphins and up to 74 similar chemical substances.

Porn is a major problem for our society.

THE SOLUTION

Let us first examine how this plays out in an affected family. I will use the example of a male, but as an aside, I must stress that the number of women who are addicted is growing in comparison to men. This has occurred progressively as women have claimed equal rights with men in every area of life.

Increasingly, books and movies also promote pornographic values. Often this material is viewed and purchased by women. The morals presented may even become the subject of talk-back radio, thus attracting a still wider audience. I personally know of one young family that was decimated when the wife left her marriage to live out the storyline of a popular book for herself.

We return to the man who has become entwined in a life of pornography. He appears different and tends to isolate himself from the rest of the family. His wife notices that a certain aggression has crept into their physical life, and she feels as

if there is a strange man in her bed.

Her suspicions lead her to his computer and mobile devices, where she uncovers a world she had dreaded. She feels betrayed; she is overcome by feelings of not being good enough for her husband. Her own feelings of self-worth plummet and she withdraws into herself to examine what this means to their marriage. “How can he do this to me?” “How can I ever trust my husband again?” These are the persistent thoughts that now rob her of the serenity and security she once enjoyed.

Let us turn to the porn addict himself, and consider how he is feeling during this process. He discovers a new digital freedom in this smorgasbord of visual stimulation. He is fired with adrenalin and feels a tingle in his stomach as his mind is consumed by lust. He banishes all thoughts of fidelity, propriety and honour. His heart says, “Don’t do this to yourself,” but the blinkers go on and he becomes oblivious to the struggles of his own moral decency. It seems

too late to turn back. His mind enters a different paradigm that says, “Forget all about that moral stuff; we can deal with the consequences later.”

An insatiable hunger overwhelms him. Perhaps he might resist more often if he were not bombarded with the sexuality of this new free world; but alas, he sees it everywhere. It is on billboards and newsstands, on the radio and television and in the office where he works. He has the impression that women and girls are parading themselves in front of him every waking moment. They seem to believe that to be successful they must look sexy and draw as much attention to themselves as possible. It seems he is like an alcoholic working in a distillery or liquor store.

I cannot over-emphasise the comments that I am now about to make to women reading this. If your husband is addicted to pornography, then he already feels rotten to the core. His subconscious self-image is that of an ugly man. He is constantly fearful that you will discover

his dirty secret; he dreads the tongue-lashing, the loss of trust and the ensuing lack of respect.

I believe that all men are wired to be heroes. A man without honour is an empty shell of a man. The thought of what the discovery of his private life will do to his reputation is almost unbearable.

Let us return first of all to what many now understand to be the root cause of addiction. As I mentioned earlier, an addiction, whether it be to porn, drugs, gambling, shopping, food, gossip, television or anything else, is a way of coping with severe feelings of rejection and being unloved and unworthy. Addiction is a mask to hide the pain.

If a person is simply vilified and punished for his actions, his feelings of self-worth diminish even further, and he is driven even deeper into his addiction. This is not, nor ever has been, a solution. It simply drives the addict deeper underground.

A person's addiction most often starts at puberty. Having stumbled into evil, he now finds it impossible to escape. If you are intimately involved with an addict, there is no doubt that his addiction will be affecting you personally. Even though he has been fighting the problem for many years, it remains an overwhelming battle in his life. The important thing is that he needs your support, not your admonition. Addiction is a disease. While many can drop the fascination from their lives, remember that twenty percent of consumers can't and he may be one of that twenty percent.

If anger and admonition drive someone you love deeper into the pit of their own despair, then you need to consider the opposite response. To do that, please ask yourself an important question: What would Jesus do? Remember, Jesus loves them so much that He gave His life to save them. His is the best, the *only*, example to follow. Be ready to stand with them and walk this journey with them. If your husband were diagnosed with a terminal illness, you would walk that journey

with him. This is no different. This is a disease that highlights a fundamental malaise in his life.

Another important question to consider is whether you are meeting his emotional needs. Are you loving him the way he needs to be loved? Your love for him may be beyond question, but are you expressing it in the way he needs to feel it?

Encourage him to attend a nearby recovery group. This is a safe environment where he can share this issue with others in the same situation, and where he can form authentic friendships and accountability partnerships.

Encourage him in every way possible. Ask him how you can love him more and tell him how he can love you more. Connect again and reprioritise. Are you both on a treadmill of paying the bills and being a life support system for your kids? If so, you should understand that you are not doing your kids any favours by neglecting your marriage.

Remember that the greatest gift you can give your children is a happy marriage. However, your marriage is first and foremost about each other. My personal advice is that you should build now for a satisfying relationship after your children have left home. Perhaps you believe that the damage has been too great to repair, but this does not need to be the case if both parties are willing to work now to change their relationship, rather than their spouse.

Remember that it is only when compassion is present that people will allow themselves to see the truth. Ultimately, it is the truth that will set you free.

I do not believe that we will ever kill the scourge of pornography. It's too late. But we can most definitely form a team around those who are addicted and apply the love of Jesus to the situation.

How long should you extend this grace?

For as long as it takes. If you don't, evil wins again.

HOW YOU CAN CONQUER THROUGH CHRIST

Graham's story illustrates God's power to change us, no matter how many times we may have tried unsuccessfully to escape from addictions like porn. Perhaps you are wondering, "Can I escape like Graham? How can I access the power that freed him?"

Graham has mentioned Jesus Christ several times in his story. I would like to explain just why Jesus Christ has such a special skill in helping people overcome addiction. Often, the claims people make about Jesus can seem rather like advertising: all words, and little substance. The phrase "Jesus saves" can seem like just another cliché. Even after you hear how Jesus can work in others' lives, it is often difficult to

imagine how it might work in your own life. If you have tried, but failed, I would like to give you hope—something to hold onto. To do this, we need to consider Jesus in a completely different way, because this different perspective can be the initial step in breaking your addiction. Jesus Christ can help you overcome addictions because He is a warrior. You may find this difficult to believe, because the Bible often pictures Him as the tender shepherd, the meek and mild Saviour. But if you read the Gospels carefully, a different picture emerges. As you piece together the incidents of his life as recorded in the Gospels, you witness His hand-to-hand combat with the forces of evil. His was an ongoing battle with a determined enemy.

Here are some of the word pictures given to us in the Gospels. Raging lunatics, waving their broken chains, rush down at Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The demon-possessed interrupt His sermons with their ranting; they are thrown writhing at His feet. Violent storms burst down on Him as He sets out on what had

been a calm Sea of Galilee. A flood of victims, those maimed and paralysed and driven mad by evil powers, threatens to engulf Him.

Jesus needed to stop the lunatics in their tracks, confront and cast out the demons, quiet the storms, and reverse the ravages of sin. At every turn, He was confronted by His religious rivals, the Pharisees. They spied, plotted and accused; they tried to frame Him with various trumped-up charges so they could be rid of Him. But Jesus was always one step ahead. He always had an answer. When He needed to be forthright, He was. He could throw the merchant allies of the Pharisees out of the temple when he needed to. He could expose their hypocrisy to the people they had duped for so long. He denounced them as white-washed sepulchers.

When Jesus came into the world, He came to do battle, to fight the good fight. And He won! He overcame every enemy; He proved more powerful than any demon, more wise and skillful than the cleverest enemy.

Our question is this: what does this mean for us, and for people struggling with addiction?

Jesus Himself tells us, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulations; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). This is the good news this great Warrior brings to us.

We may feel that an addiction is bigger and more powerful than we are, we may feel that we have no more resources left to fight. And we are right. But there is Someone who is willing to step up and fight on our behalf, Someone who has overcome everything the world can throw at us. Please remember that there is nothing that can strike you that Jesus hasn't already overcome. That is why He tells us to be of good cheer. You don't need to be of good cheer because you have the strength to be cheerful or positive. You can be happy because He has the strength. He is not just a good example in Heaven, nor is He merely a Good Shepherd smiling down on us. He is a

Warrior standing at our side, willing to fight the good fight for us.

God offers us a wonderful promise through the writings of Isaiah. Isaiah is the prophet who most clearly pictured the Messiah as the Servant who takes on our sins, and heals us with His own wounds. Chapter 53 of Isaiah states this with crystal clarity. In an earlier chapter, Isaiah gives us another picture of Christ:

“Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children” (Isaiah 49:25).

Individuals struggling with addiction feel that they are “captives of the mighty”: that they are enslaved by something much stronger than they are. But Jesus Christ, the great Warrior, comes to deliver us. He stands by our side. He vows that, “I will contend with him who contends with you.” What He means is that anyone or anything

that threatens us will have to deal with Jesus Christ Himself. Anything we try to fight against, Jesus Christ Himself will fight on our behalf.

People around the world have testified again and again that Jesus Christ has delivered them from hard-core addiction. Jesus was willing to go into battle for them, willing to stick with them through thick and thin. Jesus picked them up after their failures, and he carried them along until they could overcome.

Jesus Christ is the great Warrior who fights on our behalf. He is the great Overcomer. It is Jesus I offer you. No matter how many times you have failed in the past, no matter how powerless or hopeless you feel, the power of Jesus Christ has never changed. He is able to contend with anything that contends with you. You simply need to give Him the opportunity, now.

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Are you struggling right now with an overpowering addiction, with the ultimate expression of intimacy and commitment that has been distorted into a weapon of abuse? Do you feel like you are consumed by a raging inferno that threatens to destroy your career, your relationships and even your life?

There is hope. There is a solution you can hold onto.

Meet Jesus the Warrior. He promises to free you from the short-lived pleasure lust offers, cleanse you from shame and give you a future with hope.



Graham Hood is a senior captain in the world's oldest and safest airline. But 50 years in aviation does not define who he is as a man; that is defined by Who he serves. This has been Graham's greatest revelation as he contemplates life above the clouds.



Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for The Incredible Journey ministry. He has spoken and produced numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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