

Sam Black - The Healing Church - FINAL

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SPEAKERS

Mike Stone, Sam Black



Mike Stone 00:00

Hey, thank you for joining us. It is a new season at Behind the Mike: Conversations of Hope. If you're new, welcome. Our goal is to share Conversations of Hope from guests with amazing stories that will encourage you and point you to Jesus. Even in the darkest times. We'll also hear from experts who will give us tools and insights into the challenges that we face on a daily basis. Their advice will help us to maintain our focus on Jesus and not get distracted by the waves crashing around us. And that's what we're going to be doing on today's show. So media, from television to movies to social media and beyond have become more and more sexualized. As Christians we are to be set apart to turn away from sexualized media, especially pornography. But many Christians are having a very difficult time doing that. As porn has become more accepted throughout Western society, fewer Christians today find porn sinful. More men and women who self identify as religious are saying porn is okay. And they're doing so at an accelerated rate. 16% of Americans who claimed religion is very important to them also said that porn is morally acceptable. In just one year, that number rose six percentage points and by the end of 2018 22%, said porn is morally acceptable. Now, while some Christians accept pornography, many, many more say they know it's morally wrong, and they want to stop, but they keep going back to it. That's hurting the church. And it's hurting marriages. A survey of marriage lawyers showed that in 56% of divorce cases, a major contributing factor was one spouse's, quote, obsessive interest in pornographic websites. Well, today we have my friend and colleague Sam Black, who wrote a new book called "The Healing Church, What Churches Get Wrong About Pornography and How to Fix It." Sam is the Director of Life Change Education at Covenant Eyes. He's served with covenant eyes for 16 years. And as a former journalist, Sam also wrote the, "Porn Circuit: Understand Your Brain and Break Porn Habits". He's passionate about helping Christians live free from pornography because he knows you keep what you give away. He walks his own grace-filled journey with the support of valued allies. Listen, whether you are directly affected by pornography or not, I promise that you know someone close to you who is struggling. My hope is that you'll listen to the entire show. Share it with everybody you know, and help your church to become a safe place for people to confess their sins for healing. And now my interview with Sam Black Sam, welcome to the show.



Sam Black 03:24

SAM BLACK 03:11

Thank you, Mike. It's so good to be here. Thank you for having me on. This is this is gonna be fun.



Mike Stone 03:29

Yeah, it is. It's just a fun time hanging out with you. I love your personality and and your heart for the mission at covenant eyes. We're going to talk about that. And this is, this is something that, you know, you wrote the Healing Church to help pastors and ministry leaders, it seems reasonable that watching porn harms you spiritually. But what did you discover about that in this book, you found some really cool things in all of your research, which you've done for a long time. Now. You know, like I said, as believers, most of us I think, would say, Well, yeah, porn is something that harms you spiritually. But what did you discover about that? And how is it affecting our churches?



Sam Black 04:11

Well, we often think of that from a theological perspective, right? But I do have a little bit deeper and found that sociologists were investigating whether is pornography really that big a deal? That seems like a lot of churches are talking about it or Men's Ministry might be talking about it, but how important is pornography wild? And what they found the second or sociologist found is that it indeed is impacting the church in very negative ways. Number one is significantly correlated with lessened church attendance. So people who are watching pornography, attend church less, they have diminished feelings of closeness to God. They are there prayer frequency is impacted. All of these are negative impacts, including religious doubts, like, watch, it seems incredible to think that watching pornography actually makes you not only doubt God, but doubt that his perspective on monogamy on marital relationships, that God's designed for sex is even realistic. And so pornography is indeed having a very big impact on the church. And if the local church is not addressing it, they have a cancer that's eating away at every part of every of ministry that they're doing. Whether that is youth ministry, or Men's Ministry, or women's ministry, or marriage ministry, all of those things are being undermined by pornography in the church and about 70% of men, and about 30% of women say they have struggle with pornography on an ongoing basis.



Mike Stone 06:07

Yeah, that's incredible. And you stop and think about that, the next time you're at church, just look around. And look at that statistic. Seven out of 10 guys are struggling, three out of 10 women are struggling. And we don't look at our congregations that way. But that's really what statistics are saying is that this is a big issue in the church. What you're saying basically, and it makes so much sense to me is if I'm so focused on the secret sin, and it's like you said a cancer in my spiritual life. I'm not going to want to go to church all the time, because it kind of it, I'm ashamed of that. I don't want to be around people. It's very deflating. Yeah. When I'm carrying that shame. Yeah, yeah. And I certainly don't want to get involved at church. I disqualify myself right up front, because I've got this major issue that nobody knows about the secret sin. I don't want to be involved in church, because I'm not, I'm not up to the task of spiritually. And nobody may know that. But I do. And that's affecting me. Right.

S**Sam Black 07:13**

So Dr. Samuel Perry from the University of Oklahoma, found that if someone was watching pornography, in fact, it was significant related, the more they watch pornography, the less they volunteered, or served on a board or committee in their local church over the next six years. So if we're not addressing pornography, well, we're literally stealing or having it being robbed from us, in the local church of volunteers, Sunday school teachers and other leaders who are saying, I just don't feel like I should be stepping up to that. That post.

M**Mike Stone 07:51**

Yeah. I know what talking about

S**Sam Black 07:54**

careful, as ministry leaders think, well, those who are active and are working hard. We don't have to worry about them. Because and I've heard this a several, many times from pastors. Well, if someone's highly engaged in Bible study, and they're attending church, often and the, the, they're doing a lot in the church, they're probably okay, I don't have to worry about them. Yeah. And what I found in the research as well, that many people were piled using behaviors, that's a lot like flipping a coin. And on one side of the coin is a sort of grandiosity, spiritual exceptionalism. They're like I can, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, which is true, right? Because they haven't really dealt with some underlying factors that draw them to pornography, that coin flips, because they can only perform for so long. But one day at coin flips, they go down that ritual path that leads them to pornography, they act out, and then feel incredible shame. And that shame kind of keeps them in a cycle. And so that coin just keeps flipping, I will, I'm going to be better, I'm going to try harder, I'm going to work harder, I'm not going to tell anybody. I'm not going to seek out help. But I'm going to work harder at this. And if I just pray harder, read my scripture more, do some volunteerism at my church, then I'll be okay. And then that coin flips again, because it can only perform so much on their own for so long, and they're back in pornography. And so as ministry leaders in the church, we need to understand that there is also a cycle where some of our best performers, greatest volunteers are struggling, especially if it's their vocation. And so we need we need to offer them help and love and grace as well. We need to, but I like to I'd say this a lot in the book. Walk a safe place in the safe process?

M**Mike Stone 10:02**

Yes, yes. I think that's one of the things I've learned since I started at covenant eyes is there are very few safe places in our society and even in our churches today where people can open up and we'll talk more about that. Let's talk about covenant eyes. Been around since for 2022 years now. And in addition to the Healing Church, how is Covenant Eyes supporting or helping the local church? I don't know that people understand that we're reaching out to churches and not just individuals. So how's that happening at covenant eyes?



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Sam Black 10:34

Well, I talk just a little bit about Covenant Eyes in the book, I actually this is not a sales tool for the church. It's designed to help the local pastor, but it's important that we give pastors and ministry leaders resources that can be used in the church for men and women. So among things, we have an amazing church support team, which might you're part of, and there are a number of resources that the church and ministry leaders can tap to use in their local church, for example, there's safe haven Sunday, which is an educational program for parents to equip and teach and help them talk to their kids about pornography and sexualized media. And as ministry leaders, we often think that well, this is not. That's that's an issue for our parents to talk about. Let's not worry about that. But, man, you have to realize when you walk into a church on Sunday morning, and you look down at those innocent little eyes, many of them are being exposed pornography at such an early age. And so a program like safe haven Sunday equips your local church, to help parents equip their kids to turn away from pornography. It's so important, we take these kinds of steps, we have resources for men and women, we released an app just this past year called Victory by Covenant Eyes. And within victory, you can of course, receive covenant eyes reports and things like that. And we're continually upgrading that tool, that app. But within that app, there is more than 20 courses that are designed to help men and women understand how did I get here? Why do I stay here? And how can I really live in freedom? Men, women, teens can use that app, to really have to really move toward freedom and also provides resources for allies to help them understand how they can help help spouses as well to better understand why their spouse is struggling and how they might protect and guard their own hearts and their own lives and their relationships. So just amazing tools. I encourage anyone listening to reach out to churchsupport@covenanteyes.com or even call the number 989-720-8000. I'll say it one more time 989-720-8000 And ask for church support team.



Mike Stone 13:15

You touched on a few things that I want to talk about. I've got some some things written down here. One of those things is early exposure and children and how that all works. So we'll save that for toward the end here. While some Christians are accepting of pornography, which I struggle with that you write that many Christians really do fight their temptations to pornography but often lose in the long run. Explain that. You kind of touched on that too, that there are people out there who go on man, I just I know this is wrong, I can see what it's doing to my relationship with the Lord, I can see what it's doing to my marriage, just relationships in general. And you know, you use the coin analogy, I'm gonna fight this thing, I'm gonna fight this thing. And all of a sudden, they're losing. So explain that you talk about that in the book as well.

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Sam Black 14:05

Yeah, what to the up to two things in there? I think it's worthy of of noticing is that the longer the church's not addressed pornography necessarily very well. The more Christians have become more accepting of it. So there was a survey done in 2017. And of Christians or out people who said religion is very important to me. 16% said pornography was morally acceptable. And then just two years or one year later by 2018 22% said pornography is morally acceptable. So our morals are literally being changed by pornography. And that's six percentage points in a year. Well, yeah, it's that's been since 2018. So yes, we're definitely

seeing that Continue in the church. And sometimes that has come about because we've said, Well, you know, we're, we're, especially for men, oh, you know, men are always going to struggle. That's just part of who they are. And so we just have to almost managed the struggle, rather than learn to live in Christ's freedom. And there are people who are listening to this today, Mike, who are saying, Is it really realistic that I can live free from pornography? Yeah. It truly is. You can live in total freedom. Now there might be some people listening going, of course, you can live in freedom. What's what's wrong with these people that can't, I'm gonna tell you that. They're like me, I would pray and say, God, please take this away from me. I never want to view pornography again, I'm going to prompt people promise themselves, they promised God, they promised their spouse, they promise others that they'll never be pornography again, that they're done with it. They hate it. But they keep coming back to it. And they and they don't even know how they got into the situation they're in.



Mike Stone 16:13

Yeah, that's right. So what you're saying is men and women and teens are fighting compulsive behavior that seems out of their control. And you mentioned being stuck in pornography. How does that happen? Why is this? Why is this any different than dieting? You know, I want to I want to quit eating doughnuts. So I want to quit, whatever. Why is why is this different than that?



Sam Black 16:44

Well, in some ways, it's very similar. Our how we use food and porn, often for this very same reasons. But let for specifically for pornography. And I'll come back to that, because food addictions and porn addictions are some of the most difficult compulsive behaviors to overcome. Because we can get rid of the alcohol and get rid of the drugs, or other things, but we need food for our bodies. And we are sexual beings designed by God. And so that must be tempered, it must be redeemed, it must be a made whole and Christ. So it is, it is can be a more difficult thing. But I lead, Samsung society meetings and Samsung society is a is a community of Christian men who are working to with each other, and supporting one another to overcome something in their lives that is bigger than they are. And it's often pornography or unwanted sexual behaviors. And, and so I do a newcomer meeting. And when I do that newcomer meeting, rather than choosing a topic for the meeting, I have guys tell their story for the first time, and I tell them my story first. And then that becomes one very safe that they can do that. And here's what I hear repeatedly and over and over again. And it's backed out by counselors across the United States, that there are three big components to getting stuck in pornography. And number one is early exposure. Since 2007. With the iPhone, especially coming out, we have been handing devices to kids to entertain them on road trips, etc. I cannot tell you the number of moms I've talked to said, Hey, I just handed my phone over because I didn't allow my young kids to have a phone. But I let them play a game. And the next thing I know, a cousin or a friend or an individual child is hearing a word and sang. What does that what does that mean? And they look it up or they're curious because every child is naturally curious. And that early exposure is so impactful for an underdeveloped brain that is naturally curious. And Dr. Mark Lazar called this wonderful building blocks of sexual addiction because and he called a building block because it is foundational. It's one of the first you know, at such a young age, it creates a block which on which other behaviors and thoughts and actions are taken over time. Right. And so we must not underestimate that children are naturally curious

that they were living in a very sexualized culture. And most because it's so impactful on that young brain. Nearly every man and woman can recall the first time that they saw pornography. They can often tell you a story behind it. Number two is the repetition. It is one thing for a child to see pornography. But when it continues, especially through adolescence, it kind of begins forming neural pathways in the brain that seek out that high. There becomes a neurochemical imbalance in the brain that is seeking out the pornography and the rewards of masturbation and just the stimulus of pornography itself. And the longer that takes place, the deeper those neural pathways are carved. And it's very hard. And it takes time for those to grow over. Number three, and this is kind of like the cement to this. It is often drama or trauma early in life. It can happen to other teams life, or adults life as well. But especially in young years, while this repetition and his early exposures happen, there's often some drama and trauma that has happened early in life. Maybe it's violence, maybe it's feelings of abandonment, I tell I tell a number of stories. And I think it's important that we tell the stories of people who have come through and found freedom. Yeah. And so I do that, but also to help illustrate that sometimes the wounds are very impactful from sexual abuse, physical abuse, to emotional abuse. Two things that maybe don't seem as important like a divorce, or feelings of abandonment by one parent or another, like, maybe I don't belong, maybe I'm in the way. And so we we, we often underestimate the wounds of bullying and many other things. And what's important about this is men and women have learned to use pornography as an escape. And so escapism becomes so impactful on a on a psychological level. And, and so we often like to think that in the church that pornography is sin, which is right, and sin, causes hurt and pain, and that is true. And when hurt and pain come when consequences come there's more sin, and it just continues around. And all of that is true. It's just not complete. We have to recognize it's just not sin. That's tempting us. But often we're been using sin to coat our wounds in our pain. And we need to re align our hearts and minds. So that we're dealing with those wounds. We're dealing with life. And we're stop using pornography or food or other things as a coping mechanism. And we learned healthy ways to cope with our lives.



Mike Stone 23:04

So good. So very good. So yeah,



Sam Black 23:09

So a guy comes home from work. And he views pornography, and he feels bad about it. So he calls his outliers, his accountability partner and says, I'm out of here fail. And a good ally, is going to ask some good questions. And you'll say, Well, what happened? Well, I had a bad day at work, and I just came home and I just Yeah. Well, why did you have a bad day at work? Well, you know, I, I got into my boss fussed at me and yelled at me and I you know, just, I missed the deadline. I should have had it done, but I didn't get it done. Well, how did that make you feel? Well, I yeah, I felt pretty unworthy. Like, I'm never gonna get this right. Hate, you know, he's looking down on me and I feel bad about myself. And now you begin to uncover the emotional state that the person using pornography is is why why they're running? Why are they running to pornography? It wasn't that kids just had a bad day. There were some emotional trigger behind behind that. And so we need to dig a little deeper. And then we can when we feel a person feels those emotions. Well, they can call the friend and say, Hey, Mike, man, I'm struggling. I had a bad day, my I'm feeling these emotions, and I don't like the way that makes me feel. And I'm glad I was able to really, and you've helped me to walk through this and talk

about this in the past and man. And so when we, when we learn to lean on one another. There are so many one another's in the Bible. And James 5:16 tells us that we need to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another. So Have, we may be healed? Now, that's an amazing formula that the confession, and repentance is on my part, you the prayer Mike is on your part, you get to help me go to the foot of the cross. And God begins doing a healing work in my life, where I don't have to act out anymore. I don't have to run to a coping mechanism. And that might sound really, really strange to a lot of people who've never found this kind of struggle. And but it's it is, it is common this is this is what we see over and over again.



Mike Stone 25:40

Well, I use the analogy of the doughnuts. And that's that's why I don't know what the statistics are. But weight loss drugs and fads and exercise and all these things. Billions of dollars a year are spent on that. Right. So it doesn't make sense that there's a correlation between the two. So you know, when I have a bad day, you know, people don't look twice about me going and sitting down and eating a quart of ice cream. Kind of to soothe the day. You're saying it's very similar with pornography. Yes. Wow. So you what describes in their



Sam Black 26:15

lives to cope with our, our emotions? Or our temptations? What are we using? Yeah, and that's different. And for some people, people rage, or they have exploded, the anger, anger and pornography are often very connected in many ways that we have learned how to live well, and freedom in Christ America and manage those emotions. So maybe it's blowing up. But maybe then that leads to pornography as well. Wow.



Mike Stone 26:57

Wow. We've both heard people say, you know, just pray about it, and fight against it. And I think you've explained why it's not just that easy. Because this goes deep, this goes to the chemicals being released, and those neural pathways that you talked about, as well. So you describe three parts here, early exposure, repetitive use, and the trauma and the drama. Let's dive into early exposure a bit more. I know a lot of people listening, have children. And nobody wants to see their kids involved in pornography early in life. I don't know what it was like for you. But I remember it was about fourth fifth grade. And, you know, back then Sam, it was not in our pocket, it was not as easy as the phone. You had to get access to a magazine. right. And so I want to I want to touch on that too. Because how I don't understand, in today's world, that easy access that our kids have to it, you explain that in the back car, you know, look at my phone past the time. We don't want to see kids turning to pornography. How is that impacting them? I know you you mentioned earlier, you know, a lot of people can remember the first images. And, you know, I think that's so true for so many people. So it does have an impact on kids.



Sam Black 28:24

It sure does. I I remember I was talk I was at a homeschool conference and of course, a homeschool conference. These are often Christian parents who are doing the very best that

homeschool conference. These are often Christian parents who are doing the very best that they can to run through the media that their kids will be having access to, you know, trying to create an environment that is more wholesome than the local public school or even private school. And so, but on a regular basis, we found that parents were coming to us and saying my child was exposed in our home or in our community or in my family, with my family somewhere at 6, 7, 8 years old, and I have the stats in the book that we did a survey of those parents, but it really looked a lot like the rest of our culture. Yeah. And so you know, as we said that never before in human history has been so much inappropriate content been so available to so many kids was sold a few restrictions. I was I was speaking to I was at an again at this homeschool one specific homeschool conference. This image comes to mind and this. This teenage girl she comes and she brings her parents with her. In fact, she just brings her dad at that at first. And she says I brought my dad here to sign up for coming It is because I've been struggling with pornography since I was eight. That was when I asked my dad for his phone, because I heard some boys say some words that I just didn't understand. And so I looked them up on my phone and saw things that I didn't understand. But that I couldn't look away from it. And I did that in secret from them. Because they trusted me, they knew that I was innocent, or they thought that I was innocent. Yeah. And, and so they would hand that device over to me. When I asked, and they're sitting right beside me, and he's like, and mom and dad were both saying, this happened in our kitchen, in our living room, in our car while we were there, and we did not know it because she was had enough shame about it, and fear about it, that she would flip the screen if they looked over her shoulder. And so that, we have to understand that that is, is common. And parents typically have four myths that they believe first is my kid has a good kid, and they would never be curious. Like I was curious. As a kid, I was exposed to pornography at age 10. And I remember coming out of our Florida home, and my brother was standing there with a magazine. He's 19 years older than me, and he's standing with this friend. And it didn't make any sense that they were looking at a magazine sideways, how can you read like that? And I said, What do you guys looking at? And so they turned it around. And his friend unfolded says we don't want to miss the good part. But I had no understanding even about the mechanics of sex already have no idea what they're talking about. Right? I had a friend and his dad had pornography falling out of this closet, it looked sort of like this waterfall. And at the top of the closet was stacks of pornography that were just in some of these just hanging over. And then there was a literal pile of it on the floor. And I could take anything I wanted. And I did. And so that can be very impactful. Now Mike, I went to church, I grew up in a very religiously strict home. That was also hypocritically violent. And so pornography began a soothing for me, but let me step back to for those four myths that parents often believe in number one is my kid is a good kid. And they would never be curious, like I was curious. Number two, if they did see something like that, they would just look away because we raised them in a religious home. And we've said things like, hey, we don't. We were we're good Christians, and we don't watch some things. But they often that doesn't prepare them for what they might see in pornography. And so often, they don't really know what we're talking about. And then they are confronted by something that is hyper stimulating to the brain that fires off some dopamine gives them a spritz of reward that makes them feel good. And then gives dopamine will also give you the sense of almost tunnel vision that really focuses your attention on whatever is stimulating. And this is God's designed. This is God's designed in marriage, right. So we can join together as husband and wife, and the rest of the world disappears. That is God's design. But pornography is often corrupted our view of sex in our culture today. Number three parents say the measures I have in place are good enough. And usually what that means is that they look over their shoulders of their kids on a regular basis. And that's about it. And so they don't have protective software on their devices and reporting software on their devices to see helped them have an ongoing conversation with their kids to teach, train and disciple them. And number four, boys are the only ones who struggle I don't need to worry

about my girls. Yeah. And we just I just told you a story about a teenage girl who was bringing her. I was speaking at an Arizona conference. And a teen girl was was coming to our booth and she just kind of circled around and she'd go she'd ask some questions and I just gently allowed her to ask questions as you want. My daughter was there too. And we step by step she began to become more comfortable and said this is this is where I'm struggling and I don't know how to tell my mom and dad that I'm struggling with pornography and I've been struggling since I was a kid. This is we're seeing this on a on a common basis and women under under 30 are seeing about 26% of them said they viewed pornography in the last week. And 14% of them said they're watching it multiple times. A week. So we need to understand within the church, that we often had a bias that said, we don't need to worry about our girls. Yeah. They'll be fine. We just need to make sure that they dress the right way or say the right things or don't do things that might tempt boys and those kinds of things. But we're not equipping them. And we need to do that we need to step up as a church to equip our girls, and equip parents to equip their girls to



Mike Stone 35:31

I'm glad you brought that up, because that was one of the first things I remember at Covenant Eyes that shocked me was the number of women who are struggling. And as you said, I believe he said it was 30. And under that percentage has gone up probably tied to the access on your phone, I would imagine. It's such easier access now. And you know, and you said, you combine that with the fact that it's more acceptable in our society today. It all ties together and make sense.



Sam Black 36:03

I was speaking with a, I did an interview with one counselor who said, who was doing trainings for parents. And she said, a young girl says, you know, I use pornography because I need to know what my boyfriend wants, right? This is a Christian home. She's doing these training at a church. And she says, you know, the church didn't talk to me anything about sex. My parents don't talk to me about sex. What I learned about school is the basic of how babies are made. And, and so pornography is often used by young women as well, what's all this about? What are people and they get a wrong view? And of course, it's also lighting up those neural pathways and firing off the neuro chemicals that are drawing them in evermore.



Mike Stone 36:57

Yeah. Yeah, it really is. And, you know, we've talked about pornography on the show before. In fact, we had Brittany De La Mora on not too long ago. And she talked about the flip side of that, how she was nearly suicidal because of how it made her feel on the other end of that, so to use to use pornography as a way to learn about sex, clearly, is not well, clearly is not from God, and clearly is not helpful if the people doing that feel the way they do. You know, and you mentioned in your book, too, along those lines, that when when we were growing up, it was it was the more what would be considered soft porn now. You know, and it was it was images. today. It's extremely graphic. And that's what our kids are seeing. It was impactful for you and I growing up to see those images. But what is it doing to our kids today, when they're seeing that really graphic, demeaning stuff that's just unimaginable. We've touched on early exposure,

repetitive use the drama and trauma. I gotta go back to the fact that we're talking about The Healing Church. We've talked a lot about the details of pornography. You know, how you get stuck. The early exposure. Sam, what does this have to do about the church? We're talking about the Healing Church here. So touch on that.

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Sam Black 38:33

You know, when we talk about those early wounds, and we talk about using how people are, even without knowing or using pornography, to regulate their moods, to regulate their emotions, or feelings or find escape, that is a pattern that is not easily broken. Right. And so people often try on their own because they're too ashamed to come to the church. And often the church has provided some more simple answers, or maybe some ministry leaders that feel like I don't know if I have the equip. I'm well equipped to deal with this well, or there might be a number of things going questions going on right now. But I think it's imperative for the local church, not waiting for the mega church to take care of our problems for us, or, Hey, when you when you're ready, you can go over to that church and go to their Celebrate Recovery or regeneration recovery program or et cetera, where we can create safe spaces and safe processes in every church, and we should and why is that important? I have to go back to that James 5:16 verse of If we confess our sins, one other, pray for another so that we may be healed and If we are too ashamed, and and I was talking to a pastor and an event, and he says, you know, our church is pretty small, and I don't feel that a lot of people can be honest with one another about their sin because we know each other so well. And we're that sheen kind of holds them back. Now, meanwhile, I few minutes later, I talked to a couple and they were excited that I was working at covenant eyes. And hey, we'd love some your guidance, we're trying to find an accountability partner at my church, but 3,500 people attend my church. And I don't know if someone that I can lean into that I can ask to be my ally. That was because if the church is too small or too big, no, that's not the problem. We have to ask ourselves, what part of James 5:16 Do we not believe? And why have we surrounded sexual sins? So with so much shame, that we can't say, Hey, I am struggling, and I need help. And I pastor, I need your help. And sometimes that is, many pastors are like, oh, yeah, I really want to help and, and it typically my eyes talking to a pastor, and he says, I did a counseling. I know what you're talking about. Sam, I was doing a counseling session last week with a man and we talked for three hours. And I said, Well, are you going to do that again next week? No, I don't have that kind of time, right. So we have to understand that took a long time for people to fall into the trap and become trapped in pornography. And it is often a journey toward freedom that takes some time. And it is important to understand that we need a safe not only safe place where we can come as we are because Christ does not say, hey, when you get your act together, would you just step on over and talk to me? That would be great. But you need to get your act together first. He says come as you are in all your mess and all your filth. And I will take you now. But you just got to come to me come to me. Right. And so he is inviting us. But sometimes in the church, we have not been quite as inviting. Yeah. So we have to understand there's some there's some fear that people are dealing with that shame. And, and so once they find a safe place in the church, now they need a safe process, because a person who is who has spent so much time focused on this habit and compulsive behavior in their life, that they've been doing this probably since they were a child. And now they need to break free. Well, they've been trying to break free probably many, many, many times over if they have said, I'm done with this. I'm never coming back to this. But there's a way that seems right to a man. But what we need to do is lean on Christ understanding and not around. Yeah, but we only have so much self discipline, because we've only built so much capacity when it comes to issues like pornography. So I might have strong capacity to do a number of other things in my life well, but

when it comes to pornography, when those temptations come and when the mood I have or the triggers are, are tripped. My capacity to resist pornography might be very small. And so what I need is a person like you Mike to come alongside me that and help me with a process like the light change workbook that canonize offers or victory by covenant eyes, and some of these tools. Because left to my own devices, I will be really strong for just a little while. That's right. But when I opened myself up to a safe person and a safe process, then I have guidance. I have a means to think differently about why I'm doing what I'm doing. And when I under better understand how I got stuck, why I have continued to stay stuck and what all the lies of pornography have been trying to teach been telling me for so long and I've been believing those lies. I need to undo those lies. Learn to understand my emotions to recognize them, not stop burying them and come to you and say this is where I'm feeling and this is how I'm we'd like to say it Have a great conversation with your ally, is ask what you're feeling. Because guys hate to talk about what they're feeling, what you're feeling, what you're thinking, what you're doing, and what you're thinking of doing. And as we begin to dive deeper into that, then I can better regulate not only my emotions, but I can release those to God in prayer, I can better understand why do I do what I do? And how can I stop doing that moving forward. I'll give you a perfect a little example here. And this is going to sound maybe strange to a lot of people, but I actually think you'll really, it makes sense. So I want you to go back with me to about time when I'm 12 years old. And I am in the shed working with my dad and there is a rope that is on this plank floor. And this rope has been in the back of our pickup truck. And it has been rained on in Florida and sunshine in Florida. And that's kind of a daily thing that's just happens every day. And this hemp rope just become a gnarly, twisted mess. And my dad says to me, says Sam go over there and and tie up that rope or coil up that rope. And so the way that I knew to do a rope or cord is I would wind that rope from hand over my elbow. And I would just hand over elbow again and again until there was a coil. Which is no no, no, I don't want you to I want you to hand over hand and he was, I guess want to teach me a new way to do it. But in his woundedness his way of dealing with these things, anything was often violent. And so he said, Do it hand over hand. And as I tried that rope would twist and turn because it was such a mess anyway. And when I when it would twist, he would hit me in the in the head or on the face on the back. He would tell me I was a dummy. And I couldn't do things right. And so all of that emotion would follow me into adulthood. And in my teen years, and every time I would coil a rope or an extension cord or something like that. I wouldn't just remember that I would fall back in time. It was sort of maybe some might have called it PTSD, that I would literally be there as a 12 year old trying to maybe sometimes I would just feel awful. Sounds weird that I would feel ashamed. And I would never tell that story before. Even for writing this book. I didn't tell this story to anybody because there was so much shame. Sure, rounding that for myself. And now that might sound strange to a lot of people. But wouldn't you look down on me if you knew I came from a violent home? Those kinds of things, right. So the shame has many layers. But that emotion when I'm coiling a cord and remembering them falling through time, and it would put me in a very sour mood and maybe I might be a little more grumpy with others around me. Maybe I would feel a little bit of depression. And pornography. I didn't even realize that maybe later that day. Likely later that day, I would use pornography, but never connected to the emotions I was feeling. Because I quote that day. Yeah. Now when I got into a safe place in a safe process, well then I could take that rope. And I could do something totally different. And I would sing. And typically I like to sing, "How deep the Father's love for us..." and I would just keep that beat with that song. And release that pain and trying to regulate a mood to My Father in heaven. And so, that's what I learned about a safe process it is that when I called a rope, I would feel negative emotions. What am I going to do with that? Am I going to hold on to it? Am I going to try to self soothe it with food or alcohol or pornography? Or can I release that to my heavenly Father? God I asked him to enter my pain and walk with me and and feel all of his love for me. That is the beauty of a safe place and a safe process.



Mike Stone 49:47

So let's kind of regroup here. An overall view here. If you're struggling with pornography, a lot of people listening here. First of all we need to save place, we need accountability, because we can't do it alone. Scripture says A cord of three strands is not easily broken. We talked, we read about community, all throughout Scripture, how important that is. I grew up in the church, Sam. And I cannot remember one single time that pornography or even sex was ever brought up. And just that thought, in and of itself as a 10, 11, 12 year old boy growing up, we're going to have curiosity about how our body works, how it's different from the opposite sex. If we're not hearing about that, in our families, you mentioned this, or in the church, we're going to find out in other ways, and most of the time, it's going to be incorrect. It's not going to be God's view. I think I want to say, first of all, let's talk about covenant eyes. But also, we didn't really talk a whole lot about the book itself, the book is actually not released yet. This comes out in May. But tell us how we can connect through this right now?



Sam Black 51:20

Yes. Well, there's a lot you know, there's so many different topics in the book, and we take some chapters that really help pastors understand how they can support other ministry leaders, we talk about how do we build culture? How do we how do we build this kind of grassroots culture where we can have safe places in our church? So there's a lot in there? And so you can if you go to thehealingchurch.com, you can download the introduction, get a better view of why did I write this thing in the first place? And, and how, how do I go about it? And what is its mood? What is its tone? Separately, we can download the first chapter. So you get the introduction in the first chapter for free, just go to thehealingchurch.com. It's a free download. And I just encourage everyone listening, please preorder the book, we need to get this into our churches, you might even buy a copy for your pastor. Because you might say, man, I've struggled in this way too. And I don't think my church really understands this, would you buy a pre-order a copy for ministry leaders in your church? The more that we can do, of course, the pre-orders, the more of course, that the book can have a greater influence. And that's it sounds like a deep ask, would you preorder a book that you're not going to get into May 16, you could do a lot of good. And help us reach more ministry leaders to have a bigger impact on the church and its culture.



Mike Stone 53:02

You know, one thing I know about Covenant Eyes that I love, when I came in, it was always you know, when you be committed to the inside of something like Covenant Eyes, you're always like, Okay, I know what it looks like on the outside. But what is it really like on the inside, I love even more covenant eyes from the inside out than I did from the outside looking in, because I know the heart of the people at Covenant Eyes like you, like our Founder. Everybody that I work with, has a deep commitment to helping people overcome porn. So we're not trying to sell you a book. We're trying to help you on your journey. And I want to say that and I also want to say, you know, this is so important for pastors to have. I was so impressed when when I when I learned that the book was about ready to be printed. And I got my copy of it and read through that very quickly. I felt the same way as one of the endorsements here, Max Lucado. Anybody ever heard of Max Lucado? So Max says, "I just completed first reading of The Healing Church

and I want to, number one, read it again. Number two, share it with friends. Number three, thank Sam Black for his hard work." You did a lot of work in this you can tell just reading through this. There's a lot of research and number four, thank God for this desperately needed tool. That is so true. I wish we could get every pastor in America to read this book because it is that important. Sam, I want to thank you too. For this. This has really helped me to get a much better view. Even working at covenant eyes of pornography and how deep the issue goes and the issues of what the church needs to do. And I'm not I'm not going to bash churches because I think that it's just this this kind of vague unknown like how do I deal with this pastors are busy people. Yes, and and underpaid and overworked and all those things, but What if we could get a handle on pornography in the church, the church looks so much better and healed. So important.

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Sam Black 55:09

What I heard from from many pastors and I interviewed more than 70, leaders for this book. And what I heard from so many pastors was, once I really understood how I could help, and how my church could change, I reflected on my training and realize that I no one ever, I never had a class that helped me better understand this in in seminary, when I would go to a, a, an event for my denomination. And there would be a conference and there'd be learning opportunities. This was not something that really got addressed. And so there were lots of conversations, but typically, they were often surface. And so when I began diving deeper, and understanding how I could make a significant impact on people's lives, by addressing pornography, and other wounds like that, and other sin like that, then that opened the door to really revitalizing my church. It's amazing the number of times I and pastors will look at this and go, Okay, this is you're just adding stuff to my plate. And what I heard repeatedly over and over and over again, from pastors who are doing this kind of ministry was, I have more time now. Because what has happened through a safe place and a safe process, I have now more volunteers, more people who are saying, I'll send me I'll go, right, then I ever had before. And so what we we have to realize is that when people go through a safe place and a safe process and find real healing in their lives, they are called to give it away. Yeah. And the more they give it away, the more freedom they have.

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Mike Stone 57:11

You said early on, that when you speak, you share your story, to help open people up. And that's exactly what you're talking about now is when people in the church find that safe place, and they can expose that sin in their life and begin to heal from that. I don't want to go to anybody else. If I'm struggling, I don't want to go to anybody that's not been through it before. I'm looking for the guy who knows where I'm at, and knows how to get through it. So, so important. And in your right pastors. You know, what is the percentage 56% of marriages that are going through divorce are a result of pornography.

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Sam Black 57:48

Yeah, they say that in 56%, a major contributing factor to the divorce was an ongoing, compulsive or obsessive use of pornography. Yeah. Yeah. I think one thing did to to help here is we often and let me address something you just said. And that is, hey, I want to go with

somebody who's been through this before and knows what I'm going through. And I will say that many pastors are going oh, well, I've not been through this before. I don't know what this is really like, or I don't know if someone in my church really helped in that way. And that's the beautiful thing about a safe place and a safe process. Because we have covenant eyes, providing you the tools and the training, so that you can address this well, even though you haven't been through maybe the struggle yourself. Right. And that's important to know, I think a lot of times, people shy away from well, I don't really know how to deal with that. So I don't read probably give some bad advice, but we haven't advice to give you we have the tools and education and training that can help you as a ministry leader, a volunteer in your church or a pastor that can really provide some strong guidance and, and tools to help people learn to live in freedom.



Mike Stone 59:11

Absolutely. Sam, thank you for joining us. We've talked a lot about so much. We've been all over the place. Really, really great stuff, get the book. How else let's let's narrow this down to some action points. Now what can people do if you're a pastor, if you're a guy struggling, if you're a woman struggling? What are some steps we can take? We talked about Victory. We talked about some of our downloads that are free. Let's go through those really quickly. We'll also put those in the show notes too.



Sam Black 59:43

Yeah. Well, I would highly encourage anyone who's struggling right now to reach out to a friend to someone that they feel they can trust and say hey, would you be willing to talk with me about that? and maybe go through some resources like the Victory by Covenant Eyes. So you want it'll help you understand what I'm struggling how I'm struggling? And, and and would you receive a report from me that shows how I'm using my devices, because it seems like, you know, I'm carrying around this phone, I've got this computer on my desk and all this stuff. And that's where I'm most tempted, would you receive a report from me and you can, there's a link that you can provide for someone to actually use covenant eyes as a tool in their recovery journey. Maybe you are in a position where you know, I don't feel like I have someone that I can reach out to right now. So if you're a man, I highly encourage the use of Samson Society. And you can find that at samsonsociety.com. Now, every Tuesday at 1pm, Eastern Time, I host a newcomer meeting. So you if you can, but there's many other newcomer meetings available. You select a newcomer meeting, and you learn what Samson Society is all about how you can become a member. And then you are now opened up to a Christian community of men who are saying, Hey, I support you with your struggle. And I'm here for you, I'm not here to judge you, the walk with you. Because all these other men are walking with me too. That's right. And within there, you get all kinds of resources. It's amazing. If you're a woman who's struggling, I highly recommend SheRecovery.com. SheRecovery.com. And again, our community for women, Christian women who are looking to support one another, and their journey toward freedom. So and then, of course, I highly encourage the use of the the app Victory by Covenant Eyes, because in those courses, you'll begin gaining a better understanding of why do I, why am I supported? Why did I keep coming back here when I say that I don't want to. And that understanding understanding, and knowledge precedes understanding and understanding precedes change. And we so much want change. But we have to do some knowledge work on the front end. So we have a better understanding, so that we can lean in to that change.



Mike Stone 1:02:17

Yes, am I also in talking about Covenant Eyes, you know, the app is geared for accountability. It's got it's got filters on it. But it's primarily we know, filters aren't real effective. So the key is really accountability. And, and listen, you can download covenant eyes and get 30 days free. By using my promo code for the podcast BEHINDTHEMIKE. BEHINDTHEMIKE, we'll get you 30 days free of Covenant Eyes, you can try it out. Listen, this is for family too. If you have older children, you can you can put it on all your devices. And you can have up to 10 users on one account. So download that free 30 days BEHINDTHEMIKE promo code when you check out. And I know that will help. And it also works in conjunction with the Victory app that we've also talked about as well. So, Sam, so what's your final word here for us today after all of this information?



Sam Black 1:03:18

Well, I think it would be one of encouragement that sometimes we want to shrink back from something that it seems so enormous, so impactful. But every David doesn't meet Goliath on his own. He meets the spirit within David. And we should be encouraged that we can see the problem, we can see the giant front of this. Now it's time to turn loose some stones, it's time to go to battle. It is time to face our giants and not wonder well, if we ignore them long enough, maybe they'll go away. And because it's not happening. So I highly encourage our our ministry leaders, those who are listening. I can't I wrote the book, "The Healing Church", to help with empathy and caring not not to say hey, look what you're doing wrong. But really to help provide a better understanding. It's not to condemn. It's about how do I how can we maybe create some better understanding because with greater understanding, we have better empathy, greater care, and more love and more grace to free those who are imprisoned.



Mike Stone 1:04:41

Amen. The book is "The Healing Church: What Churches Get Wrong About Pornography and How to Fix It" by Sam Black. Make sure you go check out those links. Sam, thank you so much for joining us. It feels like we're just working right now. I want to thank you for joining us and listen, we'd love to have you back. The book comes out in May. I'm sure you're gonna have lots of stories and lots of additional things to share with us. So we'd like to have you back one. Whenever you want to come back you let me know and we'll we'll do this again. Thanks so much.



Sam Black 1:05:13

Yeah, I've had a blast being here with you and I, and I'm looking forward to chatting again. Sounds good.