

Ascend

The True Freedom Trust Magazine

Winter 2023



Resisting pornography

This edition of Ascend is about resisting the lure of pornography. Surveys expose how widespread pornography usage is, including Christians and even ministers. COVID has arguably made it even more entrenched, with people increasingly working from home and so having limited accountability around their online activity.

Sarah helpfully evaluates various resources for women wanting to be released, and so breaks the taboo around women struggling with porn. There is a growing range of excellent apps and courses available online to help us to free ourselves from the lure of porn.

Often shame keeps us isolated from speaking to other Christians about established areas of sin in our lives. Don't let porn be the one thing that hinders your spiritual walk, even when your life looks outwardly healthy.

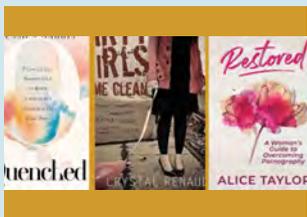
By Stuart, TFT Director



Flourishing as a living

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Stuart looks at what the Bible teaches Christians about sacrifice, and particularly what the Apostle Paul means when he calls us to offer our bodies as a "living sacrifice"



Resources for women struggling with porn

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Sarah evaluates a number of books and online resources that are helpful to women caught up in pornography use



The works of the Spirit

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Jax explains her journey from living according to her natural desires to choosing to live by God's Spirit

Flourishing as a living sacrifice

Many same-sex attracted Christians feel that respecting God's design for marriage means that they have to sacrifice their desire for a same-sex partner. I was challenged recently with the question of whether giving up a sinful relationship really can be counted as a sacrifice. Is it not merely an act of obedience?

What is a spiritual sacrifice?

This got me thinking about what the Bible teaches us as Christians about sacrifice. The Cambridge Dictionary definition of sacrifice is "to give up something for something else considered more important". But what does the Bible say?

The vast majority of references in the Bible, even in the New Testament, refer to the temple sacrifices as atonements for sin: the blood of animals was shed as a substitution for our sin. But the book of Hebrews makes it very clear that this type of sacrifice is no longer required for those who trust in Jesus' work on the cross. This is because "where [sins] have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary." (Hebrews 10:18).

However, following Jesus is more than a passive receiving of his work on the cross: Jesus says, "whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me". The cross is a picture of self-sacrifice: Jesus is inviting us to lives of self-sacrifice too.

The New Testament does have some references to what sacrifice looks like for Christians: Peter calls us "to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ". Sacrifices now no longer involve the killing of animals (remember, Jesus has taken care of sin on the cross); but the call of every believer to sacrificial discipleship involves "spiritual sacrifices". Prior to Christ's death, believers needed to take their physical offerings to the priests who would sacrifice the animals on their behalf. In Christ, however, every believer is a holy priest, able to make their own spiritual sacrifices in the way they live their lives. But what does this mean in practice?

"A life of spiritual sacrifice is one that is wholeheartedly given over to God"

Well, the author of Hebrews calls us to "continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise" (Hebrew 13:15) and not to "forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrew 13:16). So, worship and good works are spiritual sacrifices. A life of spiritual sacrifice is one that is wholeheartedly given over to God.

What's this got to do with same-sex relationships?

The Apostle Paul applies the language of sacrifice specifically to our bodies:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:1-2)

Paul’s “therefore” takes this idea of our bodies being living sacrifices and links it to the argument that he has been building in chapters 1-11 of Romans. In particular, it is in stark contrast to the degradation of bodies described at the start of the letter:

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.” (Romans 1:24)

Whereas ungodly people are given over to sexual impurity and specifically same-sex activity (Romans 1:26-27), the Christian by contrast is called to offer his/her body as a living sacrifice, which does “not conform to the pattern of this world”. It seems that Paul is actually saying that sexual purity, abstaining from the sexual immorality so prevalent in our world, is an act of living sacrifice, which is “your true and proper worship”.

Worshipping through sacrifice

It is really important to remember though, that our sacrificial lives

aren't in any way a payment to God. Our sacrifice is a response to the great news of the gospel, that Jesus has become the ultimate sacrifice for us. That's particularly clear in the Romans passage - we are to offer ourselves up “in view of God’s mercy” rather not to gain God’s mercy by our own merits!

When we think about offering our bodies as living sacrifices, we need to be careful to avoid any feelings of pride in doing so. God has ordered this world, and He’s made it clear that none of us is entitled to a same-sex union. Even though aligning our lives with God’s ways involves sacrificing our desires, we shouldn’t pity ourselves or allow a sense of martyrdom to take hold. Rather, we should present this sacrifice with a genuine attitude of “true and proper worship”.

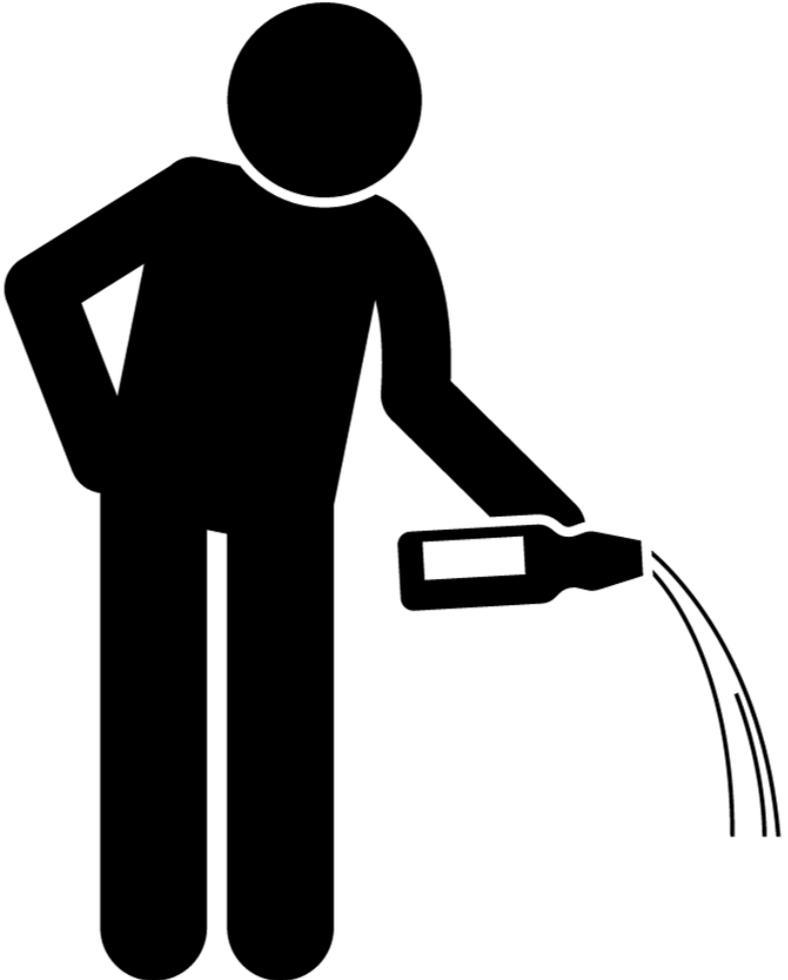
“Our sacrifices demonstrate what we really value in life”

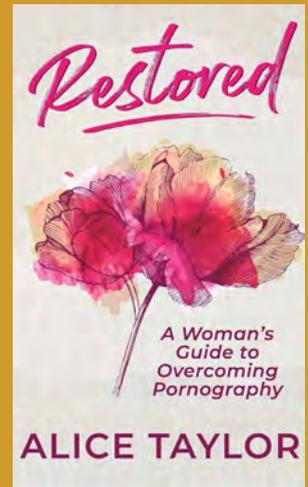
Our culture tells the celibate person, “don’t waste your life!”, but no sacrifice is wasted in God’s economy. On the contrary, it is magnified. I am reminded of the story of when David was hiding from Saul in the Cave of Adullam and his body “longed for water” (2 Samuel 23:13-17). His companions took great risks against the enemy to bring water back to David from Bethlehem. Rather than drinking the water, however, he poured it out on the ground as an act of worship. His sacrifice demonstrated to those around him

that his God meant more to him than his bodily appetites. By giving up this temporary treasure, which would have greatly satisfied his thirst, it was transformed in God's sight into an eternal treasure in heaven. Likewise, when we offer our "bodies as a living sacrifice", by abstaining from bodily desires, we worship God and show him to be the one who is greater than any temporary gratification. Indeed,

our sacrifices demonstrate to us/ others what we really value in life. Such acts of worship actually build our faith and are an amazing witness to those around us.

Stuart is TFT's Director and the editor of Ascend magazine. He enjoys cryptic crosswords, but often ends up wording backwards from the answers.





Resources for women struggling with porn

At least it's not porn." This phrase ran through my head somehow giving personal validation to my choices as a young teenager to gaze upon historical artwork of unclothed persons, dwell on human anatomy in science textbooks, and re-watch scenes from some popular movies. I was allowed to see all of these things, so surely it wasn't wrong. I kept telling myself, "it's not porn," but I was still using it as visual stimulation and it morphed into erotica in my mind. These desires and habits became ingrained, and the trajectory was set. As I got older and moved outside of a computer guarded by my parents, I sought stronger images and could no longer claim the excuse, "at least it's not porn,"

but rather had to admit that I had a real problem with pornography.

I am not alone. Some statistics suggest that as many as 87% of Christian women have watched pornography. The Covenant Eyes website states that 15% of Christian women watch porn at least monthly. This number increases significantly as you look specifically at younger generations of women. Yet many churches and resources continue to portray pornography as a men's problem, and women who need help can feel excluded. If that is you, know you are not alone. Here are some helpful resources, specifically for Christian women struggling with pornography.

Click to Kick (online small group course) By Naked Truth Project at nakedtruthproject.com

I have written a separate review of the Naked Truth Project (see page 26) since it pertains to both men and women. But it's worth noting here that they do have Click to Kick groups specifically for women. This is an 8-week small group course held on Zoom for understanding addiction/compulsive behavior and tools for recovery



Beggarsdaughter.com (blog), Triggered (free pdf)
Quenched: Discovering God's Abundant Grace for Women Struggling with Pornography and Sexual Shame (book) By Jessica Harris

This blog has significantly shaped how I think about recovery and freedom from sexual sin. In one of my favourite posts titled, "What Does Freedom From Pornography Look Like," the author asks her reader to picture what their life would look like free from pornography. She suggests that far too often, people expect their life to stay as is, just without clicking on porn. This, she says, ignores the bigger picture of healing, redemption, and freedom that Christ brings into our whole lives.

She talks about singleness, her own story, the need for better conversation in the church around women and pornography, hope and healing for those struggling, and more recently, as her life stage has changed, how her history with pornography has impacted her marriage and motherhood. She does not struggle with same sex attraction (SSA), but she has some posts that acknowledge the reality of SSA and how that can impact porn use. It was reading her posts and following some of the resources she suggested that led me to reading and thinking more about my own struggles with SSA.

She has not added much to this platform in the past year, but her previous posts remain relevant and helpful. She also has a page of listed resources for Christian women struggling with pornography that includes more books, devotionals,

small group resources and videos than I could mention here.

One resource also available through her website is a free pdf titled, *Triggered*. She considers three categories of triggers: internal, external, and inevitable. After defining each category, she develops what is unique to each type of trigger both in how it manifests in our lives and in how we best respond. This practical and realistic tool could also be helpful when considering triggers related to SSA not just pornography.

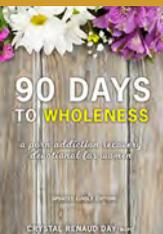
"Many churches and resources continue to portray pornography as a men's problem"

More recently, Jessica Harris has released a new book titled, *Quenched*, that I would highly recommend. This whole book centres around the story of Jesus and the woman at the well in John 4. It is not a book of practical steps to break free from porn, but rather one that solely points to Christ and how his love meets us in our places of shame and offers living water.

This book came out in 2023, more than a decade since my days of being trapped in pornography, but God used it to reveal shadows of shame still hiding in corners of my heart that need healing. The title, *Quenched*, comes from the picture that water not only can be used to

put out fires already ablaze, but can also soak the ground so future fires won't be able to break out. May we be so quenched in living water with

our desires fulfilled in Christ that the fires of sin cannot find a foothold in our lives.



Dirty Girls Come Clean (book), 90 Days to Wholeness (devotional) sherecovery.com (website), By Crystal Renaud Day

Crystal Renaud Day first released a book in 2011 titled, *Dirty Girls Come Clean*. This is a short, accessible read that brings

light to women trapped in pornography through Crystal's own testimony and suggested steps for moving towards healing. She describes these steps using the acronym SCARS, encouraging one to Surrender to God, Confess, seek Accountability, take Responsibility, and Share. This is a great place to start if you want to know you're not alone and get some ideas for how to begin seeking freedom from porn.

“It's the gospel that transforms hearts, minds and lives”

90 Days to Wholeness develops those steps further into an interactive devotional. Each day there is a scripture verse, a short thought, and a question/prompt for the reader to answer. The author wisely recognizes that these steps are less about behavior and more about the heart. As with many things, it would be easy to give surface level answers to the prompts, but it's in really sitting with them and allowing God to draw to mind the honest deeper state of your heart that you will

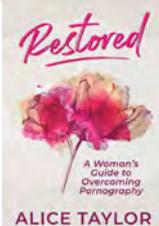
likely find the exercise of answering the questions more helpful.

As her training and ministry expanded, Crystal founded *SheRecovery.com*. This is now a paid membership-based platform where women addicted to pornography can find help and community. The basic monthly membership (currently \$25 USD/month) provides access to unlimited meetings, much like Alcoholics Anonymous, which happen daily on Zoom. However, based in the USA, only a few of the meetings occur at times that would be generally reasonable in the UK time zone. The premium membership (currently \$30 USD/month) also allows access to a private chat group for community. This paid platform was set up after I was already well into in my recovery, so for me, it didn't seem worth joining, but I can see how it could be beneficial for someone especially in the height of their struggle. If you are outside the United States, the website will convert into dollars from your currency when you pay.

SheRecovery.com also offers some free resources. Most notably, their podcast allows you to hear from counsellors, theologians, authors and others who speak about faith, pornography, recovery and freedom. There is also a free Facebook group in which many

women find community and a place to ask questions and share struggles. A decade ago, I found that group quite helpful, but since the paid community options have emerged, I have found

the Facebook group less well moderated and some of the ideas posted need to be considered with a bit more wisdom and discernment.



Restored: A Woman's Guide to Overcoming Pornography (book) By Alice Taylor

This is the most comprehensive and practical book that I have read for women and pornography. It uses

personal stories, biology/science, and faith/theology to provide a well-rounded assessment of pornography, addiction, and recovery. Then it offers practical questions for reflection and action steps to connect the material to your own life and road to recovery. I appreciated that the author defines addiction, but also recognizes that you don't need to be clinically addicted to pornography to need help in this area. She also draws out some things specific to women like how your menstrual cycle can impact desire and temptation.

When discussing accountability partners, she recognizes that for SSA women it may be tricky finding a woman with whom to share intimately about your struggle with pornography without it becoming a trigger for SSA. While this is not primarily a book about SSA, it was nice to have that seen and recognized. Also, some of the chapters on intimacy and right thinking about God in light of struggling with sexual sin are absolutely applicable to SSA even for those not struggling with pornography.

The chapter on masturbation provides one of the most grace-filled yet wisdom-driven discussions I have heard on this topic. Even at our TFT women's conference earlier this year, there were different perspectives put forth about masturbation. Recognising there are differing views even among believers, the author does not mandate what is right or wrong, but rather provides a structure to think through your motivation and what is going on in your mind, heart, and body at a time you might choose to masturbate. She helps you consider what is right and helpful in your own recovery and walk with Christ.

There is some danger inherent in any book that describes steps to recovery. Namely, it can provide the false sense that simply going through the steps will necessarily lead to healing and a diminished struggle. This book and these steps may be a tool God chooses to use, but it's valuable to remember that it's the gospel that transforms hearts, minds, and lives.

Sarah loves going outside for all kinds of adventures and staying home to play music or board games. She is also adamant that an American biscuit is nothing like a British scone.



Can one walk upon the coals?

“Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.” – Proverbs 6:28-29 (NIV)

The short answer to the rhetorical question in Proverbs 6 (“can one walk upon the coals?”) is probably, “yes, you might get away with, but it’s wise not to take the risk”. If it were that easy, this article could stop right here! But we all know that we’re tempted to flirt with temptation, particularly sexual temptation. How can we convince ourselves to keep well away from temptation? Let’s use Proverbs 7 as a short three-act drama to illustrate what happens within us when we flirt with temptation and allow ourselves to progress on the stepping stones towards sexual sin. It’s a tragedy in three acts. The quotations below are from The Message translation/paraphrase, as it is quite hard-hitting and might help us to hear familiar verses in a new way.

Act 1 – We walk too close to temptation’s door

“As I stood at the window of my house looking out through the shutters, watching the mindless crowd stroll by, I spotted a young man without any sense. Arriving at the corner of the street where she lived, then turning up the path to her house. It was dusk, the evening coming on, the darkness thickening into night.”

– Proverbs 7:6-12 (The Message)

In this first act, our protagonist is pictured as a foolish young man walking close to the house where he knows the seductress lives: she represents sexual temptation, but really the focus is upon his foolishness in walking close to where she lives.

The passage also mentions the time of day. For this young man, night-time was approaching. For many people, there can be a particular time of day (or time of the week/month/year) associated with vulnerability to sexual temptation – even being aware of when this is for you can help to prepare you to be ready to resist temptation’s pull.

The application for us is to think about the ways we personally might walk in the direction of sexual sin. What are our “stepping stones” towards sexual temptation? These might include:

- Places (actual locations where we may have “acted out” sexually in the past)
- Websites or apps (places online where temptation is only a click away)
- Trains of thought (fantasies or memories, perhaps about particular people from the past, that we know are unhelpful and likely to unsettle or arouse us)

Act 2 – Temptation comes out to meet us

“Just then, a woman met him—she’d been lying in wait for him, dressed to seduce him. Brazen and brash she was, restless and roaming, never at home, walking the streets, loitering in the mall, hanging out at every corner in town. She threw her arms around him and kissed him, boldly took his arm and said, ‘I’ve got all the makings for a feast—today I made my offerings, my vows are all paid, So now I’ve come to find you, hoping to catch sight of your face—and here you are! I’ve spread fresh, clean sheets on my bed, colorful imported linens. My bed is aromatic with spices and exotic fragrances. Come, let’s make love all night, spend the night in ecstatic lovemaking! My husband’s not home; he’s away on business, and he won’t be back for a month.’”

– Proverbs 7:13-20 (*The Message*)

In the drama, the seductress is lying in wait for the young man, ready to

take advantage when he is weak. For us, there might be actual people from the past who would be ready to drag us back into sexual immorality in a moment of weakness.

But in our technological age, we also need to guard against the big organisations that know our weak spots all too well. For example, a streaming service like Netflix can build up over time a surprisingly accurate picture of the type of “click-bait” that will work well on us individually. For each of their products, they have a range of thumbnail images, from which they will pick the one that their algorithm thinks is most likely to make you click on it – perhaps one for this male actor and a different one for that female actress, carefully selected just for you! How do they know? Well, it will be based on your clicking history from the past. And for different people, there might be a streaming service or website or app that is a particular snare.

So, Act 2 of this drama particularly invites us to ask ourselves in what ways does sexual sin come out to meet us? And how can we guard against such approaches?

Act 3 – The point of no return

“Soon she has him eating out of her hand, bewitched by her honeyed speech. Before you know it, he’s trotting behind her, like a calf led to the butcher shop, Like a stag lured into ambush and then shot with an arrow, Like a bird flying into a net not knowing that its flying life is over.”

– Proverbs 7:21-23 (*The Message*)

This is where the drama comes to its tragic conclusion. The young man was out walking in her neighbourhood at night (Act 1). She comes out to meet him and he stops to chat. And he listens as she flatters and sets the stage for the final act (Act 2). And only after all these other things have happened does he finally commit the sexual act (Act 3). At each of these stepping stones, he is free to make a wise decision to turn back, but it becomes increasingly difficult to resist.

By Act 3, the young man has more or less surrendered himself to sexual sin. He is so far down the path of seduction that resistance seems all but impossible. We might think of times when we ourselves have felt helpless to do anything other than to follow through with sexual sin. But we will almost certainly have made unwise decisions earlier on the path to sexual immorality.

Epilogue – This is a serious matter

“So, friends, listen to me, take these words of mine most seriously.

Don’t fool around with a woman like that; don’t even stroll through her neighborhood. Countless victims come under her spell; she’s the death of many a poor man. She runs a halfway house to hell, fits you out with a shroud and a coffin.”

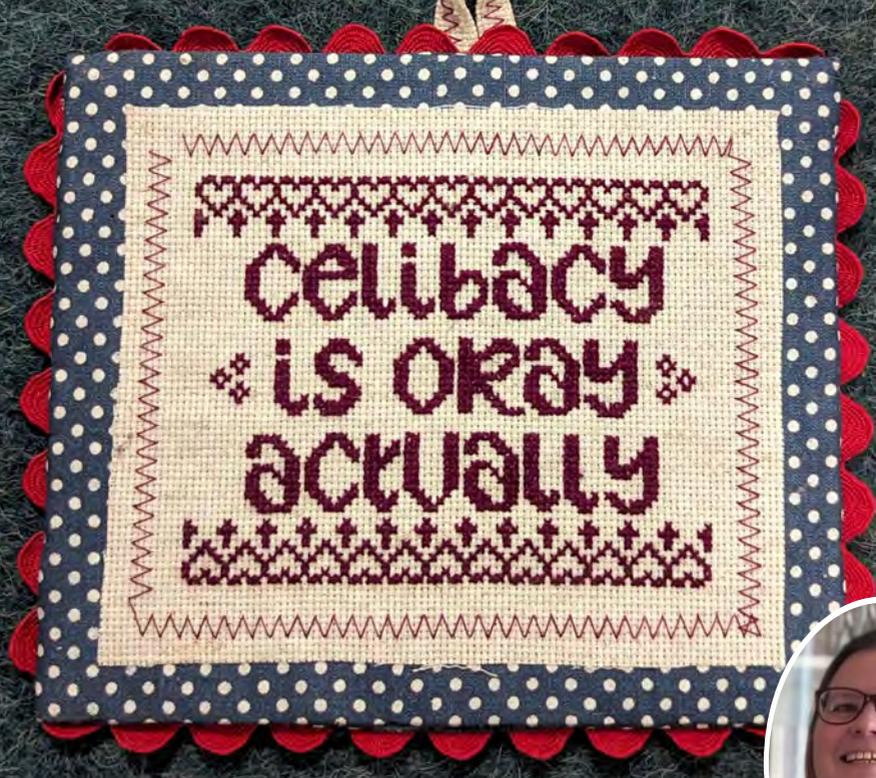
– Proverbs 7:24-27 (The Message)

In the Epilogue, the focus comes upon the unnamed onlooker who is dispensing his words of advice. He calls us to take his warning seriously, and not to fool around with sexual temptation. We should look upon those drawn into sexual immorality with pity, because turning our back on God and embracing sexual sin is a route to spiritual death.

Afterword

Proverbs 7 is a dramatised warning not to go anywhere near sexual temptation. We are all vulnerable to temptation, and the time to protect oneself from being ensnared is not late at night, when we are tired and triggered. Rather, this passage invites us to steer well away from temptation’s door, to be very conscious of how particular people and devices might approach us at moments of weakness, and to be under no illusions about the ability of sexual temptation to entangle us and lead us away from God. We can be thankful to God for the wisdom of this book – let us take these words most seriously.

This article is based upon the seminar “Can one walk upon the coals?” at the 2023 TFT National Conference



Art & sexuality podcast

In this conversation, Ruth talks with Ros Clarke about how she uses art and craft to consider matters of sexuality, celibacy and singleness. She explores how art has been a way of bringing a message of biblical truth about sexuality to the church. She also shares how being single and celibate is challenging, but how she has ultimately found it to be a joyful way of living.

To listen to the podcast, you can subscribe to “Ascend Higher” on the major podcasting platforms. Alternatively, listen directly from the TFT website using the link below:

truefreedomtrust.co.uk/podcasts





Jesus took my guilt and shame

One morning, while still in bed, I had a big light bulb moment. I suddenly realised that I had got myself into a big hole. I was drowning, and I wasn't really sure how I got there. I had become addicted to pornography.

I was, I like to think, a respected Christian. I had a good life, a good job and dreams for the future. So, how come I ended up in this place of despair? It had begun, as so many things do, many years before, in a place of loneliness and pain, depression and fear, and, to be honest, stupidity. It started slowly; my moral compass was gradually and incrementally eroded. None of which is an excuse, but (following years of counselling and support) gave me some explanation for what led up to the moment of sinking in the Slough of Despond, and what the triggers were. The guilt and the shame were my own, but there were reasons. If only I had dealt with them earlier and been honest about

the fear, anxiety and depression I was living with, then maybe... although you can't go back in time. All you can do is make sure you never go there again and (hopefully) help others.

I was brought up learning that all pornography was wrong. Once I had crossed that line, sitting alone in secret, the slow, painful movement towards the chat rooms and addiction grew. I shouldn't have been anywhere near it. I knew that. But my repentance and remorse came too late.

“My moral compass was gradually eroded”

Opening up

Honesty is everything. Telling my family, closest friends and church leadership where I had got to was the most painful thing I had ever done. If only I had gone to them

earlier. If only I had sought advice. But I was a Christian with supposedly everything together, and admitting I had issues would be a failure. I was not allowed to fail. So, I had to bottle it all up. And my problem became a very dark, hidden thing.

“I hold on to my faith and God holds on to me”

I would not have got through it all without the brilliant care of those I confessed to, my counsellor and even my very understanding doctor. The entire process, from the light bulb moment to now, has taken over four years. The depression and thoughts of suicide would have overwhelmed me if it wasn't for the brilliance of those who looked after me, going above and beyond anything I deserved. I was given the right advice and care, undertook courses and am standing now.

Receiving forgiveness

Those around me helped me understand that I had done something that was damaging me, but that it shouldn't define the rest of my life. As Brené Brown puts it, “Shame is ‘I am bad.’ Guilt is ‘I did something bad.’” Or, as the US rapper Lecrae puts it, “Guilt says, ‘You failed.’ Shame says, ‘You’re a failure.’ Grace says, ‘Your failures are forgiven.’”

I had done something bad, but that did not mean I had to live with the shame for the rest of my days. Isaiah 61:7 says, “Instead of your shame, you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace, you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours.” Jesus came to take my guilt and shame. I had to repent and take responsibility for where I had got to, but forgiveness means not living in that darkness anymore, and I need to learn to forgive myself for my failures. If God can forgive me, then I should seek to do the same. As Isaiah 43:25 states, “I am the one who blots out your transgression for my sake, and I'll remember your sins no more.”

Moving on

I still have anxiety attacks and suffer from depression. I still live in fear of others finding out about this deep sin and some of the worst of me. I still struggle to accept the forgiveness shown by those around me, let alone my Saviour. But I am (slowly) getting there. However, I hold on to my faith and those around me. Thinking about it, maybe it would be more honest to say that God, and those around me, hold on to me.

This article was written anonymously



My battle for freedom from porn

I have been battling with porn for most of my life. My first encounter with hard core porn came between the ages of 11 and 12. I never thought at the time how much this would destroy me. Years passed and I would regularly watch videos or look at magazine images. At the age of 18, I made a commitment of faith, but, sadly, not very much changed in my behaviour. A week before my 21st birthday, my life with Jesus took a big step forward. I began getting help with my alcohol dependency, but my issue with porn remained unaddressed. The subject would come up in church but, as with many people, I would say, “Not me - I don’t do that sort of thing.”

Slipping back

Sometime later, my old life resurfaced. I moved away from following God and began a same-sex relationship - this came to end in 2008. In finding my way back to Christian fellowship, I began to pray for help with my porn addiction. My drinking had stopped and I had been dry for 8 or 9 years, which is still the case today. But porn

remained a big issue - I would pray for help, but would keep on slipping back into using it; I think I only managed about 6 months of freedom from it. An accountability partner was recommended, yet knowingly I hid things - I would just have two computers and show my accountability partner the computer that I didn’t use for porn! Even with the best intentions to stop, the addiction felt unbreakable.

Finding help

More recently, I was going through the “Your Version” Bible study guides and came across a 30-day guided programme called “Freedom from Porn”, so decided to sign up. When the 30 days were completed, I also found the related free app online (search on Apple or Android for “The Freedom Fight” or find the website thefreedomfight.org). With help from the app, I have finally broken free from porn for an extended period. The recommendation to engage with an accountability partner, in order to be open with another person, became so important to me. Sharing this desire for support with the

men's group that I meet with monthly was not easy, but the benefits I have received from being honest in this area have encouraged me so much. Since writing this review, I have been free from porn usage for over 150 days. What has also helped is daily Bible reading and praying. Nevertheless, there have been a few close calls with temptation to view porn; I can only say that God has strengthened me to resist.

Benefits of using software

How does the app work? Well, you need to be committed to a daily check-in. Firstly, you write down a few words about how you are feeling. There is a checklist to tick the word that best describes your mood. Then there are short videos to watch, which give you helpful information about the effects of porn; that leads to a better understanding of the way this addiction takes hold of your mind. There is also the option to link up to an accountability friend, or to join a group, so that you can invite others to support you in this struggle.

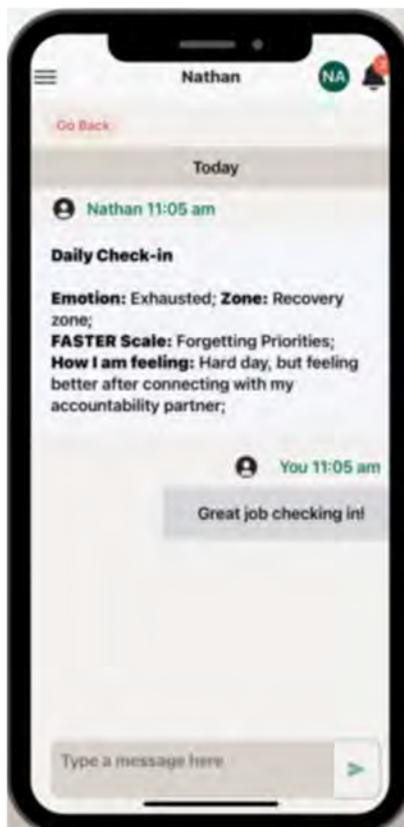
“I now better understand how this addiction takes hold of my mind”

If this is your battle too, I do hope that you find an end to the fight. May I ask for your prayers in the temptations that I have, as I pray for all who read this, to take up the challenge to stop themselves? You can be free.

Ongoing challenges

The biggest thing that has changed in starting this process of release is how dangerous I see porn as, even “light” porn. Adverts for men's clothing or fragrance can be triggering to me. God has pinpointed other issues since my victory, that I need to work on, like controlling my swearing. God's ongoing mercy is essential in every area of my life, but I know that God is good.

Colin used to think that Scotland was God's country, but when he came to know God he saw that the whole world belongs to God.





The works of the Spirit

I grew up in a Christian home. My Mum is a Spirit-filled, born-again believer of Christ, and brought up my sister and I to attend church and Sunday school.

My Dad left my Mum under quite heart-breaking circumstances when I was just 2 and moved about 30 miles away. We usually saw him at the weekend. He and Mum had been elders at a local Church of England, but upon his sudden departure, Mum felt unable to return to church.

It took Mum some time to recover from Dad's leaving and, alongside ill health and having two young daughters, she took a 3-year break from church. When I was 5, my godmother introduced us to a new evangelical church about 6 miles from home. This was a turning point for Mum, and my sister and I quickly got stuck into Sunday school. Our congregation were Bible-believing and Spirit-filled and we grew up with an awareness of God's law.

Bullying and feeling different

Once I reached secondary school age, I realised that the niceties of primary school were over. Even though I attended a Catholic school with good safeguarding, I was bullied from day one all the way through to year 11. I was picked on by boys for being ugly and from girls for not making myself look pretty enough. I was frequently told that I was gay, but to be honest, I didn't really understand what it meant, as I'd had no sexual feelings. I just thought I was a tomboy and was never one to follow the crowd. I do remember that when girls around me talked about pop artists and bands and raved about guys they thought were attractive, I'd generally think in my mind that the girls were more attractive.

Prom night came in year 11 and I decided to make an effort with my appearance. Suddenly those people who'd bullied me for years were not insulting and were actually nice. I wore a beautiful dress, had a spray tan and wore heels, but I felt out of

place. I felt like that wasn't really me and people were accepting me for someone I wasn't really like.

The end of my school years and start of sixth form was difficult. My Dad took my sister and I on holiday and revealed to us that he had secretly re-married 5 years earlier and had another daughter. We found out we also had 3 stepsisters, all of whom knew everything about us and we knew nothing of them. Additionally, one of the elders (whom I saw as a father figure) at church died suddenly of cancer. As a 16 year old, I was heartbroken at his death and couldn't make sense of what was happening in my life.

I stopped going to church. In fact, I didn't return until about 10 years later.

Boyfriends and same-sex feelings

I moved out of home at 19 to live closer to my work. When I was 21, I broke up with my long-term boyfriend (who I'd met at 11) because he didn't want to come and live with me. I then joined a Christian dating site and, at 23, met another boyfriend who I did live with. My poor Mum tried to tell me that this wasn't biblical, but I wasn't interested. All my friends were living with boyfriends and I didn't want to be left out.

The relationship wasn't a happy one. Three days after my boyfriend moved in he lost his job and we were both living off my low salary. I lost my virginity to him, but it didn't work out and we broke up when I was 25.

It was around this time where I started to feel sexual attractions towards women rather than men. I'd had sex and I knew what those feelings felt like - but those feelings were only naturally being roused by women and not towards men. At the same time, I felt I really needed to get back to church. I hadn't really been happy since I left and realised that I couldn't do life without God.

“I stopped looking at women as people and more as sexual beings”

Finding a home at church

I started going to a church local to my house, where all the sermons seemed appropriate to what was happening in my life at the time (aside from my same-sex temptations). Outside of church the same-sex attractions were getting out of control. It felt like it was all I could think about. I was looking up gay celebrities, using porn sites, thinking about secret crushes I had at work and looking at gay dating websites. I stopped looking at women as people and more as sexual beings. I also started telling certain friends about what was happening. I so longed to go to a nightclub and just have a one-night stand, but something within me said no. I knew deep down that it was against God's will, and once I opened up that path it would be difficult to come back from it.

Unbeknown to her what was really going on, Mum invited me to a Christmas service at my childhood

church at Christmas 2016 - I was 26 then. I heard God's voice during that service: "It's time to come home." There had been a change in leadership since I left 10 years prior and most people in the church didn't know I was Mum's daughter. I was seen as myself, Jax. Everything felt different, lighter, exciting. I was obedient and left my church near to home to come back to the church I had known as a child.



“The lady cried when she heard what I'd been going through; we cried together”

Battling same-sex temptations

The worship and fellowship there were just amazing and I felt myself growing spiritually. However, this intensified the battle with same-sex feelings going on in my head. It was getting more and more difficult to cope mentally. After 6 months I plucked up the courage to tell two ladies separately at church how I was feeling. The first (one of our senior leaders) gently said to me, “We don't love you any less knowing this information about you”, and that she didn't believe that acting on my feelings was God's best for me. I nearly cried at the love which was shown towards me. The second lady cried when she heard what I'd been going through; we cried together. The Holy Spirit moved her to tears. Both ladies helped me go through the Bible, counteracting with Scripture this battle going on in my head.

We read Galatians 5:13-26, which talks of the Spirit and flesh being at war with one another. These verses almost jumped off the page and suddenly I could make sense of what I was going through. I prayed hard, “Lord I don't want to feel like this. I choose to live by the Spirit, I CHOOSE THE SPIRIT.” Gradually this battle in my head lifted. I grew in such confidence at church, finding courage to firstly pray out loud, then pray for others out loud. God replaced my battle-weary head with peace of mind. I can't say the same-sex attractions completely went away, but on the occasions where thoughts popped into my head, I always had the strength to speak Scripture at them and feel peace again.

God's plan for me

I had reached an age when I started to feel quite depressed that I wouldn't find a husband, and being married was a desire in my heart.



The thought started creeping into my head that every man was either gay or married already! In summer 2019, my Mum felt God say, “Just see where Jax will be in two years.” When COVID lockdown came, I remember washing up in my kitchen and praying, “Lord you know my heart, you know what’s best for me, and you know better than me who would make me a good husband. I trust and lay in your hands that you will find me a husband.” I felt peace and any time a negative thought popped into my head I spoke “No, I trust you Lord” in response.

Within 5 weeks I had a message on Christian Connection from my now husband. We got married in August 2021 - what an answer to my prayers and my Mum’s word from God!

We are happily married and are both on fire for the Lord. I can’t say

the same-sex feelings have ever completely gone, but I am open with my husband and there are no secrets. I know with using Scripture I can come against temptations. I believe God is calling me to use my testimony to help others. I was so excited to hear about TFT and to know that there is a support network out there for Christians with these attractions.

Ministering to others

There is a lot of talk about conversion therapy, which I am pleased to see that TFT do not agree with. My own testimony shows that these feelings may still exist, but we don’t have to act on them. They do not have to control us, because God is in control. He can use those who have same-sex attractions to help others. If God did remove these feelings from born-again believers, how could we minister and help others?

Let’s see where God takes things next!

Jax has a passion for classic cars, and shares this love with her husband. They own a 1957 Morris Minor called Doris.



The Porn-Pandemic

One of the recent open day lectures run by Oak Hill Theological College, was on the theme of pornography. This was given by Robin Barfield, a children’s and youth worker.

The reality

Robin began by listing some statistics on pornography use:

- 12% of all websites are pornographic (4.2 million Sexually Explicit Internet Material (SEIM) websites existed in 2015)
- 42% of all internet users (male, female, young and old) view SEIM
- 10% of the 42% are viewing SEIM daily

Men are more likely to watch what is called “gonzo porn”, which is viewing the raw act of sex, while women often want more of a storyline when they are watching porn.

What do we need to remember about porn use?

Firstly, using porn can affect our body image. Men aren’t normally accustomed to seeing other men’s body shapes and therefore porn can distort their body image. Women

aren’t affected as much as men, as women are more used to seeing the shapes of other women’s bodies in magazines and on social media. Secondly “centrefold syndrome” can arise, where women are objectified, especially when men view SEIM. This then can also give room to “trophyism”, especially seen in celebrity culture. This is where a woman is used as a trophy, as it were, alongside a famous personality. Sadly, this culture of “big name, woman as trophy” can be seen in American evangelicalism. This abuse of women can breed damaging and negative attitudes towards them from men - that they are to be used sexually, rather than loved.

These facts and outcomes can be quite shocking, especially when one statistic says that the average age of exposure to SEIM is 11. This suggests that many children have seen SEIM before that young age.

How do we respond?

It can feel quite upsetting to reflect on this data. Perhaps we know people in our churches and youth groups who may struggle in this area. We ourselves may also be

addicted to porn. There is a need to remember that our bodies aren't entirely who we are. It's also what we are inside that matters. Nevertheless, reflecting on the book of Genesis, we see that we are created beings. We need to be those who reinforce the belief that bodies are good things and that we should look after them. We are made in the image of God and are living sacrifices to Him. SEIM is impersonal and therefore separates the body from the personality. Remember our feelings and longings are part of the Fall and sometimes these are broken. Let us not believe the lie, "You are what you feel". Ultimately pornography is dehumanising. It removes the image of God from people. People become things to be used, not individuals to be loved and cherished.

Pastoral care

Robin then finished his talk by giving some practical tips:

1. Gate the eyes - block porn. People need to stop watching it before the heart can heal. Robin explained that people hate themselves for using porn and are scared to tell people they struggle in this area.
2. Heal the heart. It is necessary to show plenty of grace. People will feel very shamed. This sin is forgivable; we do not adhere to the purity culture. Life is not over when we sin in this area. We need to bring darkness into the light. Remember that whoever is struggling is a child of God and is saved by grace – saved by Jesus.

One way of healing the heart is to delight in God, loving what He loves and hating what He hates. As Thomas Watson says, "Until sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet". Finally, Robin reminded people of the difference between finite and infinite pleasure - SEIM is finite and Christ infinite.

What do churches need to do?

We need to TALK about the dangers of porn, in our families, youth groups and small groups. Russell Moore says, "The most dangerous sins to our Christian lives are the ones we think are anonymous, the ones we think no-one knows about, so we think get away with them". This means building a culture of honesty within church, which can be helped by older members walking with younger members in their struggles. Churches should celebrate biblical marriage and ultimately the marriage of Jesus and His Church, in order to lay the foundation for healthy and fruitful sexual relationships.

This was a helpful lecture and gave insight into pornography. What I found particularly useful was how men and women view pornography differently and how we can pastorally help people who struggle.

To access the original lecture search online for "Robin Barfield Porn Pandemic".

Owen (with permission from Robin Barfield).





Taking a stand at Keswick

This year TFT decided to raise the ministry's profile by having a stand at Week 1 of the Keswick Convention. The ministry exhibited alongside other mission stands in the same hall as the book stall and the coffee shop. A few TFT members were at the Convention and offered to help staff the stand during peak traffic times - before the morning Bible Reading headlined by Sam Allberry and late at night after the Evening Celebration.

As well as having literature for people to take, we also wrote case studies on a whiteboard for each day, on a range of pastoral issues. These included themes such as *"How would you support Jessica who has strong romantic feelings for her friend Rachel?"*, *"How would you help Joe who is struggling with pornography?"* and *"How would you answer your colleague who wonders why God would be concerned with what two consenting adults do in the privacy of their bedrooms?"* These were great launchpads to conversations with passers-by, who would otherwise probably not have engaged with us. What we discovered was that these cases are not remotely hypothetical,

but are real situations people are encountering and thinking through. One day we arrived at the stand to find that someone had written their answer on the whiteboard for us to read! We also had some good conversations with non-believing staff at the event, which was particularly exciting for us.

"The stand was a good investment for TFT"

Interaction on the stand

Most people we spoke to were positive about what we do and their theology was in line with the TFT basis. I personally had a good conversation with a teacher trying to work out how to support students who identify as non-binary. If TFT is to have a stall again, it might make sense to target Weeks 2 and 3 which have a younger demographic. This would encourage us in helping more people think through how these issues affect their churches, schools and workplaces.

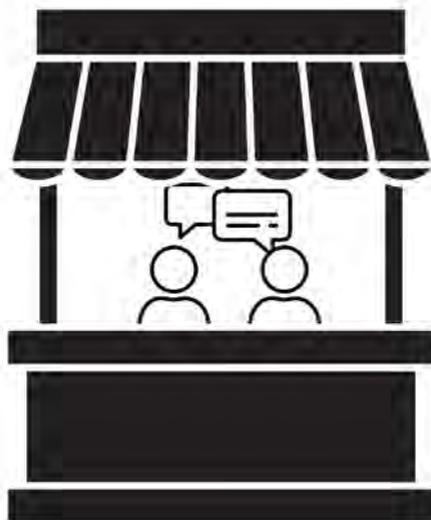
There were a few amusing moments. I was solicited by a lady

in her seventies, and another member had a dynamic conversation with an octogenarian couple about porn! Still another volunteer was told that she looked “normal” - good to know!

On the whole, we felt this opportunity with the stand was a good investment for TFT. Few of us had been so public before and were

nervous standing on the stall; sometimes it was pretty quiet and we felt quite exposed being stared at by bored people in the coffee queue! But it was encouraging to hear so many people’s support for us and the ministry.

Jem (on behalf of “the crew”)



Will you stand with us?

Could you help support a stand at a convention? We are hoping to visit more conventions and conferences over the next year. Your money could help go towards making our ministry known in more areas and reach out to more people.

*truefreedomtrust.co.uk/donate
or call us on 0151 653 0773*

£5



“Naked Truth” review

The Naked Truth Project, nakedtruthproject.com, is a UK charity “committed to changing minds and changing lives through awareness, education and recovery programmes.” The website opens with a video of a powerful poem; this beautifully depicts their goal to teach about the harmfulness of porn and provide a vision for life, human flourishing and restoration. Toward that end, they offer a variety of resources to help parents, spouses, teachers, schools and churches understand and address issues of pornography. While those are all valuable, this review will focus on the opportunities specifically for individuals who are actively struggling with pornography.

Kick-starting recovery

The primary programme on offer is called Click to Kick. A small group of participants meet weekly with a trained facilitator on Zoom, to complete an 8-week course focusing on understanding addiction, positive sexuality and healthy lifestyles. The group discussions, as well as some assignments between

meetings, encourage both personal application to those topics and developing tools towards change in one’s own thinking and behaviour. The material is well written, educates without sounding too academic and is thoughtfully and graciously related to the real lives of the participants. There are men’s and women’s groups. Overall, I would recommend this programme for someone looking to kick-start their recovery.

Caveats

My main hesitation or caution stems from the lack of emphasis on faith and spiritual aspects of recovery. The organisation itself is created and run by Christians. They have the perspective that we are more than bodies and brains, but also are spiritual beings with souls; what we are yearning for is ultimately God and that prayer and spiritual components should play a role in recovery. However, they want their groups to be accessible to everyone, so therefore most references to faith-based subjects are mentioned more as an aside or in optional activities. My Click to

Kick group was only comprised of Christians, so we did include discussion based around the gospel, but that's not always the case. Also, they welcome LGBT+ people to these groups, without regard for creed or practice. While the focus is pornography, not sexual orientation, there is enough overlap of possible conversation that a TFT member might find it triggering or uncomfortable to be in a group with a sexually active gay person.

“The group discussions encourage both personal application and developing tools towards change”

Cost

Click to Kick is free with donation giving as an option. After completing that course, one who shows commitment to sexual sobriety has the option to join the Whole Life programme, which incurs a monthly fee (currently £50/month). Whole Life allows you to continue your recovery in community with ongoing support groups, encouragement and discussion for those who want to go deeper into recovery and restoration.

Online videos and resources

For someone not quite ready to jump into the Click to Kick programme, there is a free online video course called Ctrl-Alt-Del. This series of 28 short videos presents similar content as the Click to Kick programme, but more abbreviated and without the discussion and accountability. Still,

the videos are engaging and informative and they do suggest some questions for reflection or resources for further study. This course also contains four optional videos about faith and the spiritual impact of porn and recovery. One of these describes two hindrances to holy living: forgetting who we are and whose we are and fracturing or compartmentalising our lives. These are good reminders for all believers, not just those who struggle with pornography.

Benefits and drawbacks

Because it's undertaken independently online, one can complete the course at one's own pace. This can be beneficial for some, but could also be detrimental for those who would either rush through, without truly engaging with the material, or would take too long between videos and lose any momentum or retention of the contents. This course is designed for men and women. However, there is one video specifically for men, discussing the relationship between porn and erectile dysfunction. That is announced at the beginning of the video, so women can skip that video. I wish there was a similar video discussing things unique to women.

In addition to these courses, individual coaching and counselling is offered, as well as some in-person intensives and retreats. More information can be found on the website.

Sarah

Review of National Conference

I have been a member of TFT since 2019, but I have actually never been to one of the National Conferences before. This year, when a fellow Barnabas Group member and friend brought it to my attention, I decided to take advantage of the opportunity. I am so grateful I did, because it exceeded my expectations!

The conference was held in Shropshire, a part of the country I have also not been to before. The location and local area are beautiful! Arriving at the venue, you are surrounded by green hills and tall trees. It truly felt like I was arriving at a retreat, a welcome break from my busy life in the city.

Welcoming atmosphere

When I arrived on Friday evening, I was warmly greeted and welcomed to the conference by staff members and attendees. I was just in time for dinner, followed by a time of worship and teaching. Meeting and connecting with my room-mates, who were from different parts of the UK, was thoroughly enjoyable. The rest of the weekend followed the same trajectory. It was filled with more worship, teaching, seminars, group breakout sessions and sharing meals together. I must admit, the food also exceeded my expectations. On the Saturday there was an opportunity to get involved with various outdoor activities as well. I joined a group who explored one of the nearby villages. The rain was pouring down, but we had a great time together!



Hope in Jesus

The highlight for me was probably just having the opportunity to connect with other men and women who I can relate to when it comes to sexuality and singleness: people who are in a similar situation to me. These are people who are also trying to navigate life with same-sex attraction while following Jesus. Our speaker was Andy Robinson (pictured). In line with the theme of the conference, we are people who might have sorrow at times, yet are rejoicing, in the hope we have found in Jesus. It is so encouraging to know others who are with me on this journey. It brings joy to my life!

Le Roux