Ep 172 - Initial Edit

**Shelby:** [00:00:00] Welcome to Daily Grace. We believe the Bible is true, trustworthy and timeless, and we want to help women like you, know and love God's word. The Bible shows us who God is and who he is changes everything. My name is Shelby.

**Krystal:** And I'm Krystal, and we want to invite you to come join us as we chat about the truth of God's word in our everyday lives.

**Shelby:** One of the most common topics we receive requests to cover on the podcast for is pornography. We receive questions from women who are addicted to pornography and want to know how to be free. We received messages asking why pornography is wrong and how it is outside of God's design for sex. We get requests to give guidance on marriage. We get requests to give guidance on how a marriage can heal if a spouse is addicted to pornography. And we get asked how to protect young minds and hearts from the exposure to and use of pornography.

In response to all [00:01:00] of your questions, we have put together a four part series on pornography that we are very excited to share with you.

In each episode, we are bringing in an expert to talk about this important topic, and so that they can share how freedom and healing are available and possible when we approach pornography from a biblical and gospel centered perspective.

We pray that this series is helpful to you, whether you yourself struggle with the issue of pornography, if someone you love struggles with it, or if you just want to understand more on this topic from a biblical standpoint. You are listening to the second episode in this series titled, Pornography: It's A Women's Issue Too, with Dr. Joy Skarka.

Dr. Joy Skarka is passionate about creating spaces to free women from sexual shame. Dr. Joy is going to share her story of sexual shame and addiction and the path to freedom that she has found in Jesus. Dr. Joy is the Director of Discipleship for Authentic Intimacy, where she leads [00:02:00] online small groups for women with unwanted sexual behavior.

She coaches and teaches Christian leaders how to help women find freedom from sexual shame and pornography. Dr. Joy has written numerous online articles, appeared on many podcasts, led workshops, and currently leads online recovery groups. In 2021, she graduated with her doctorate degree in educational ministry from Dallas Theological Seminary focusing on helping women find freedom from sexual shame.

Joy married her husband, Zack, in 2017, and they live in Florida. We know that you are going to connect with Joy's honesty and vulnerability and learn from her wisdom on this important topic. Come join me and my conversation on women and pornography, addiction and recovery with Dr. Joy Skarka.

Hey everybody. Thank you so much for joining us today for this second episode in our four-part pornography series on the Daily Grace Podcast. [00:03:00] Today, I am joined by Dr. Joy Skarka to talk specifically about pornography addiction and recovery in women. Joy, we are so glad that you agreed to join us and that you're willing to share your story and wisdom with us on this issue of women in pornography.

**Joy:** Thanks, Shelby. Thanks for having me. It's definitely a topic that needs to be talked about.

**Shelby:** That's very true. You know, we get a lot of topic requests, but this is definitely the one that we see the most that we hadn't yet had an episode on. So we're really excited to bring this series to a lot of people who either struggle with this issue or just have questions of how to help someone else they love who struggles with it.

**Joy:** Mm. Yes. So true. So good. This'll be good.

**Shelby:** Well, just to get us started, can you first tell us a little bit about yourself and the ministry work that you do?

**Joy:** Yeah, so I love my job. It is such a gift and a blessing. I work for a ministry called Authentic Intimacy as the Director of Discipleship, and we create resources to help people understand God's [00:04:00] design for sexuality, we offer online groups to help people through different seasons and struggles ,and to find freedom. And we also train leaders on how do we have conversations like we're about to have today? How do we start these conversations in our churches? So people can feel comfortable to begin opening up and sharing their story and find healing and freedom.

**Shelby:** Wow. That's amazing. I love that you focused, not only on the individuals, but also on leaders in churches and really helping them to shepherd and disciple their people in this issue as well.

**Joy:** Right. Yeah, if they don't know what to do, then it's going to keep women and men stuck in cycles of shame, right? If they bring and share their struggles and then they're met with a bad response. So we hope that by helping leaders figure out how to talk about this, it then will also help our people find healing and freedom.

**Shelby:** Yeah, that's great. I love that. So, you know, just personally, I follow you on Instagram, and so I've seen that you've had a very [00:05:00] exciting few months and you have a very exciting month ahead of you. So I'm wondering if you'd want to share with our listeners about some of the big life changes that you have had recently and will have soon.

**Joy:** Yeah, there's so much to celebrate over here. So I just became a doctor...

**Shelby:** Yay!

**Joy:** So glad to done with school and finished up. My dissertation was on how women experience sexual shame and how they find freedom. And I'm currently turning that dissertation into a textbook. So I'm excited for that to come out.

**Shelby:** Wow.

**Joy:** So that's my current big project, but on top of that, my husband and I, we're adopting a baby girl and she's due next month. So we're just praying, everything works out and, that we get to bring her home.

**Shelby:** Yeah, lots of exciting things in your corner of the world. So, can I ask a question about your schooling? You specifically chose to focus on sexual shame in women. Is that something common that people get a doctorate in or focus on for their dissertation?

**Joy:** No, it is not. And I, [00:06:00] really couldn't find many other dissertations to read on similar topics. I had to kind of look at big picture shame, research, and academic writing, and then sexuality. There was a lot written on that, but kind of combining the two, I could only find a few that really combined the two and then basically nothing that combined them and then talked about women.

There's still a lot of research that could be done on this area. And I'm hoping to explore more and write a book specifically on sexual shame and women in the future, because while just hearing, I ended up surveying and interviewing over a thousand women, and just reading and hearing their stories of the shame they experienced, but also the hope that they had from the freedom, how they found freedom, it was so encouraging. I was like, wow, everyone needs to hear these stories. So... someday.

**Shelby:** Wow. Well, I personally can't wait for that book and I think that's helpful for us to know, [00:07:00] going into this conversation, that you're coming into this not only having studied it in an educational setting, but also have had these conversations with so many women hearing their personal stories and reacting to them.

So that's really going to help, I think, our conversation today as well. And you know, we invited you here today, Joy, because you are an expert on these issues really, and you're passionate about helping women find freedom from sexual shame and specifically freedom from pornography use and addiction, and I'm wondering if you can share with us just a little bit, where did that passion come from? What made you want to narrow in and really help people in this area.

**Joy:** Yeah, thanks Shelby, and it's just so cool how God takes our stories of pain and shame and makes them our passions. And so this was a huge part of my story, and I'll share a little bit about that. But when I was walking through all this, I couldn't find resources for women and that made me want to create them because I didn't want other women to feel the same aloneness [00:08:00] that I felt as I was walking through all this.

So my story, I first saw pornography as a fifth grader. I was 11 years old, and actually the average age of first exposure is seven, so I was older than the average. And that's the average. So we have kids younger than that discovering it,and for me it was a friend who opened her computer and showed it to me. I had no idea what it was, it wouldn't become a problem in my life then, but it definitely awakened questions, curiosities ,desires that I could later point back to that moment and just see themes and patterns unfolding. And so that kind of continued into growing into high school and just acting out, trying to find love. Never finding love, never feeling fully satisfied or fully known by men, and other high schoolers. And so I go to college and on my third day of college, I was date raped on my campus. [00:09:00] And yeah, it just, it's nothing you would want anyone to walk through, just the pain, the heartbreak, the depression that followed that. All of the big theological questions I was asking. God, did you care? Was it my fault? Why did this happen? All these big questions and, that could be a whole nother podcast, but what happened was, because of what happened to me, I had all these questions about sex as well, and that led me to Googling them. And Google is not a good sex educator. Right. Um, Google led me down this rabbit hole to pornography, to hardcore videos, there's different types of porn and it led me to the hardcore stuff. And so it started as just curiosity, needed to be educated. Didn't have a good sex education growing up, and then it quickly became my coping mechanism. What I turned to when I was angry, lonely, anxious, really, any [00:10:00] feeling as I was walking through this sexual trauma, I would turn back to this. And so it wasn't until I was a freshmen struggling, no one knew. And it wasn't until a friend invited me to a college ministry event on my campus later that year. And I heard another woman go first, and share her story of struggling with sexual sin. And until that point I had never heard a woman, let alone a Christian woman, say the word pornography out loud. So I didn't know it was okay to talk about, and I just remember feeling like this weight of shame lifted off my shoulders and I got to go up and talk to her about it afterwards. And from that moment just became intentional with discipleship. She started discipling me, and helping me process through this, and helping me find a counselor. And so that, moment really was the turning point for me and my freedom journey.

**Shelby:** Wow. Thank you for sharing your story. I know you said that initially it started as, an exposure [00:11:00] that you didn't have a lot of control over, it was a friend, and then after that curiosity. Do you find that that's similar for a lot of women who end up addicted to pornography?

**Joy:** Yeah, so there's a few different ways women are exposed. So you have accidental, that could be like from pop-up ads or emails or something. But then there's a high percentage of women who are exposed from their significant others, like a boyfriend, even in marriages, we see that happening. People think, hey, let's spice up our love life by watching porn. When in reality, it causes so much damage. It doesn't spice anything up, and we see from family members in abusive situations or accidentally discovering, a parent's porn stash. That happens a lot. And even TV, movies. I mean, what is PG 13 now was not PG 13 years ago. And so we're just seeing more and more explicit content in our media.

So those are some of the ways that people are [00:12:00] exposing. And often too, it starts. with soft porn is kind of the difference . And soft porn would be more of those like romance, magazines, novels, or sexting,or chat rooms. Those sorts of things would be considered soft porn, but for women they're more likely to start there than men. But it quickly becomes harder hardcore porn over time, and that's where they become more addicted,and they need different varieties and more quantity of it.

**Shelby:** Yeah, and I'll just mention that the bonus episode that we're releasing with this series is specifically on how to have conversations with your kids. So that, not if,but when, unfortunately they are exposed to pornography, they know what it is and they know how to handle it, and they know that they can talk to you about it.

And so, with the increase in technology, I feel like there's also been an increase in wisdom available to parents on how to handle these things with their kids. So someone listening might be thinking, wow, how can [00:13:00] I, maybe protect my children from experiencing some of those similar things? I'll have you check out that bonus episode for sure. But you touched on this already Joy, but I read some really compelling statistics in your ebook, which is called Freedom From Porn For Women. and I got that on Amazon and we'll link it in the show notes, I thought it was really thoughtful, and rich, and enjoyed it a lot. But you said that one in three women under the age of 25, seek out porn monthly. And that it is not just an issue outside the church, that many Christian women struggle with porn too, yet pornography is typically talked about as a men's issue and it's not regularly talked about in the church. So can you just speak to this for a minute? Is it just a men's issue? Do Christian women struggle with porn?

**Joy:** Yeah. Great question, and so the largest porn site on the internet, they actually release their statistics every year, and it's fascinating to just read what they present. And so for 2021, they actually shared, there was a 5% increase in [00:14:00] women viewing porn from 2020. So now we're up to 35% of the viewers are women, and what's even crazier is there's different kind of types of porn. And so one is called popular with women, which just tries to draw on what women long for, of being known and loved. Think of it as a romance novel to the extreme. A romantic movie to the extreme. And so they said from last year to this year, it grew 41% in viewers, that, that almost doubles So this is definitely a growing issue. More women are watching porn each year and more Christian women are watching porn each year. And so this isn't a guy problem, this is a human problem. A problem that we need to address. And so the problem is that when in sermons, for example, often in sermons, the illustration, when porn comes up, maybe a pastor just not realizing what he's doing, he might say, "Hey, this is for the [00:15:00] men,"or, "Hey, all you men, women you don't have to listen right now, we're going to talk about porn." But what that does is that makes women who are struggling, which we see is a high percentage, feel so much shame. And they think, wow, can I even talk about this? Is it okay that I'm a woman struggling?

And so really, I think one of the best ways as churches is we can just start changing the language. When we talk about porn, we can start including women in this conversation so that they can feel safe to come forward and share their story and struggle. Maybe not with that pastor, but maybe we can have other women who are leaders or on staff that they can come to for support.

**Shelby:** Yeah, I love that. I think that is so important, and I know when we shared with our team that we were going to have this conversation and we asked, "Hey, what questions do you have about pornography that you would want answer it through these episodes," several of the members just said, " I so often hear that it's a men's issue, and I just want to know that it can be a [00:16:00] women's issue too." And so I thank you for sharing those statistics and that information. Like you said, this isn't a men's issue, it's just a, human issue. and so anyone can struggle with it, but I'm wondering if you can share with us, what do you think the root issues of pornography use and addiction really are? Because there's often something happening beneath just our actions. That's driving that.

**Joy:** Hm. Yeah,so I think one of the biggest root issues is that shame piece. So because the exposure rates are so high and so often it's happening, accidental or from someone else when that first happens, that shame makes women not want to share with other people. So it quickly could become a struggle. And then you turn to it, you feel shame, you don't tell anyone, it keeps you stuck in this addictive cycle. But the root of that, even, if we want to go even deeper, I think is a lack of understanding, a few things. A lack of understanding God's design for [00:17:00] sexuality. So, so often since sexuality isn't addressed for women most of the time. Women don't realize that God created us as sexual beings and it's okay to have sexual desire and it's okay to have these sexual questions. We just have to figure out how to steward and honor God with our sexuality. And so when we have these desires and even when people watch porn, they have sexual desires, but they don't know that this is a wrong outlet for it. And so that shame kind of creeps in. So I think if we began talking about this more, about sexuality, and that it's okay to have these desires, and helping women steward them in singleness and in marriage. I think that would help a lot. I think also not understanding God's character is a big one. Meaning, in my survey and my research, I found that women thought that because of their struggles, because of whatever. And I didn't just focus on pornography, this was [00:18:00] all types of sexual sin and shame that they felt. They felt that because of their struggles, God would no longer love them. Some women even doubted their salvation, like they wrote on this survey that they didn't think they were saved anymore because of their struggle with porn or same-sex attraction or whatever it was. And wow, like if we got down to this root issue of knowing that God loves us, no matter what, that God cares about us and wants us to understand his design and wants us to pursue holiness, but we can't even get to that space if we're stuck in shame. And stuck in this habitual pattern. And then lastly, I think, kind of a root here, is that shame prevents us from being fully known in community. And so we're afraid to share that we're struggling. And so that keeps us stuck too, in these cycles of addiction.

**Shelby:** Wow. Yeah, I think everything that you just said is so [00:19:00] deep and so needed. So let me ask you this question as well. How do you think the gospel speaks to these root issues? And you touched on that just a little bit with God's love, but what is the gospel's answer to those issues?

**Joy:** Such a good question. And I love as a Christian that we get to talk about this, right? Because that's the difference between a podcast episode on porn. That's not a Christian conversation. And so what is so encouraging for me? And if we think about the cross, and we think about Jesus and, his death for us on the cross, so often in pictures and descriptions, Jesus is kind of covered with like a loin cloth type of situation. When in reality, and this might be graphic to think about, but Jesus was up there naked. He was up there and died for us naked and he experienced sexual shame in ways that we will never understand. But it helps us [00:20:00] to realize, wow, he understands the shame that I'm experiencing right now. If I was walking through a porn addiction right now, he understands that shame that I feel. And so being able to kind of realize that, and come to him, and know that no matter what I share with him, one, he already knows, right? We can't hide from him, but two, he's going to love me and embrace me and forgive me for whatever it is that I've done. And I love the story in the garden. I think it's the perfect example of sexual shame entering in to our world, right? Adam and Eve, they eat the fruit and they realize, "Hey, we're naked," and they experience sexual shame for the first time. But what is so beautiful about this story is they hide behind bushes, they hide from one another, that's what shame does, makes us hide from each other. And it made them hide from God. And shame makes us hide from God. But God, what does he say? He says, [00:21:00] where are you? And we know that our God knows everything. He knew what bush they were hiding behind, right? But I think what that is saying is he's inviting them back to a relationship with him. He's saying, "I want to see you. I want to know you. I know what you just did, but I'm not going to leave you there naked and ashamed. I want you to come back to me," and then he ends up providing clothes for them. And eventually, that's pointing to what Christ does for us on the cross. And wow, just a beautiful picture of the gospel of God, fully taking on our shame and fully redeeming us and forgiving us in our brokenness.

**Shelby:** Wow. That's so beautiful. And yeah, I love the story you shared about the Garden of Eden, because what is God's response? It's to draw near, and it's through the sacrifice of an animal to cover their shame, but then we have Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice, who covers all of our shame for all of our sins. And so, that was just really encouraging and uplifting. And I [00:22:00] think that might take us right into our next question, which is, is there hope for someone who struggles with pornography? I'm going to ask a couple of questions on this topic, my first one is just, can they be free from their addiction?

**Joy:** Yes. Well, I mean, even looking at my story, I found freedom and I hope that my story gives you some hope, because I know what it's like to be so stuck that you feel like you'll never be free. and so there's a few ways that you can begin your journey of freedom, and I like to call it a journey because it doesn't happen overnight. And sometimes there's a difference between a struggle and an addiction. And so if this is something for you that has become an addiction, meaning you feel like you have no control, you can't stop, you leave social gatherings, knowing I'm going to go home and watch this, and no one can stop me. It becomes so habitual a part of your daily [00:23:00] routine. Then I would say you need to seek out a professional counselor to help you unpack those root issues, to get to the bottom of this, to help you with healing. Because sometimes an addiction, just like a drug addiction and alcohol addiction, it's rewiring our brain. It's changing our thoughts and our patterns. And so you need some help and that's okay to admit. I went to a counselor and it was so helpful, and so I think that's a great first step. And it's just some other ways, some ways to begin your freedom journey, confession, bringing it to the light, finding safe people, safe Christian community, to begin that confession. It could be in a small group at authentic intimacy, we have online book studies and we have some, we do one, on pornography. We have another one called Grace Based Recovery, that one is so helpful. We have one on sex and the single. girl that is helpful for understanding God's design for sexuality. So finding that safe community to [00:24:00] begin talking about this, and then another practical way is knowing your triggers, but that doesn't mean we won't be triggered. That doesn't mean something won't happen that'll trigger us to think about it again, or maybe where something happens that is similar to what happened in the past. And so the more we understand our triggers, the more in that moment, when we're triggered, we can run to God or run in a safer direction, than running back to pornography. Just one more thing, this is just so helpful. Practical. Is this acronym H.A.L.T. And it stands for hungry, angry, lonely, or tired, hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. And those are the four most common times that we want to turn to something, it could be anything really for comfort. And so recognizing that these are real needs, and finding safer outlets to turn to. I think those practical things give us hope because it gives us a plan [00:25:00] like, Hey, we can practically take steps today to begin walking in this freedom journey.

**Shelby:** Yeah, that is so helpful. And we are definitely going to in the show notes, have a link to Authentic Intimacy. So people are interested in being a part of one of those small groups. If that's their next first step, maybe in this process, they can find that there. You know, another question on the topic of healing that we get from women is, will it be possible for me to have a fulfilling and flourishing marriage if I've dealt with pornography addiction.

**Joy:** Yeah, I get this question a lot. And I was at a speaking event and a girl came up to me afterwards and she was crying and she said, you know, "I finally found freedom from pornography, but I just have this fear every day that a Christian man's never going to love me." And I was able to tell her that, if a man loves Jesus, he's going to look at you like Jesus looks at you. And that is pure, made new, set apart, redeemed. And that doesn't mean it's not going to be [00:26:00] hard, but that is such a beautiful picture of the gospel. And so it was definitely hard for me, I think, to get rid of some of that shame, and the shame came from my husband, never struggling with pornography. And so I think that comes from what we've done historically of placing some sins as worse than other sins on the spectrum. When in reality, we are all sexually broken. That's something Dr. Juli Slattery says, and she's the founder of authentic intimacy. She says, "We're all sexually broken." And that helped so much in this journey because I was able to stop comparing my sin to my husband's sin. Where he, even though he didn't look at pornography, he still struggled with lust. He's still, you know, different things. And so that helped a lot. And then also just being partners with my husband and communicating with him when I felt triggered. Communicating with him, especially when dating, I think it was a lot harder [00:27:00] in dating because we had these boundaries. And I think because of my past, and my sexual sin, I didn't like those boundaries and wanted to cross them a lot more than he did. And so communicating with him, "Hey, we can't be in this situation it's triggering me." And knowing that he, trusting him, that he wanted what's best for our relationship. He wanted to honor God. And so that's why it's so important too, that you're marrying someone who loves the Lord, because he's going to want to honor God with this as well. So there's so much hope in that. And I truly believe that there's redemption in all of our stories. And now my husband is my biggest supporter and cheerleader in this ministry. He loves that we get to talk about my story and he loves being a part of it. So it's cool how God kind of redeemed that for me.

**Shelby:** Yeah, I love your story, and just all of the wisdom that you just shared and the quote from Dr. Juli, that you shared, we're all sexually broken. You know, I think that might even help [00:28:00] people who don't struggle with pornography use or addiction, but know someone who does, because that's not necessarily a worse sin. It's not, we're all sexually broken in one way or another, and so I'm really glad you shared that. So Joy, another question that we got a lot was is it worth it, to be honest with ourselves, with the Lord and with others about pornography use and addiction, because it feels really hard and really vulnerable as you shared so many times. So, why is it so important to confess this and to work it out, to become free from it?

**Joy:** Yeah, it is really hard. I totally agree, and that's why I like to go first. Because I think if you hear someone else share their story, it's a little easier to then share theirs. And so even as I work with so many women in our groups, I'm always going first and sharing my story, inviting them to then share. But, say you don't know anyone else who has ever shared or say you've never [00:29:00] heard these conversations. I think it is still worth it because this is the first step is acknowledging the struggle and then confessing it first to yourself second to God, and then finding those safe people in community. And honestly, I think if you don't do, you won't begin this journey to freedom. If we don't start with confession and realizing our own brokenness and our need for Jesus. Really. Oh, this is a big part of it too is so often with struggles we think, okay, I'm going to do it on my own. I'm going to white knuckle my way to freedom. And we try and do it by our own strength apart from the power of the holy spirit, and that's not going to work. One practical example of this is I have women that I'll say, "Hey, I count my days, I'm on day like seven. I haven't looked at porn and not that that's necessarily a bad thing, but what that's doing is [00:30:00] training us to do this by our own strength of checking off these days, instead of a daily dependence on God.

**Shelby:** Wow. Yeah, I love that. Just a switch in mindset from white knuckling it through. Like, I am going to get better to know every day it starts over. I depend on God today, just like yesterday. I love that example that you just gave. So we've talked a lot about shame so far and I feel like, even after a pornography addiction, maybe someone's found freedom from that, the shame lingers. So can you talk us through how you have overcome shame related to pornography use in your life?

**Joy:** Yeah. So for me, a lot of the shame came from thinking I was the only one who struggled, right? I was the only one, and that this was a men's issue. So, so much of it at first was education. Once I heard that other woman go first share her story, and then I began to realize, oh, well, you can talk [00:31:00] about this. So that kind of was the first thing, and then I joined a small group. I was in an in-person group and I shared my story, realized other women were struggling. And so we went through different curriculum, different books were really helpful. I think at that time, the book I was most familiar with was called No Stones by Marnie Feree, really helpful resource. It's more broad, it's on sexual addiction for women total, like all different types. So, that was helpful. And really, I didn't know about Authentic Intimacy at the time. I didn't know about Covenant Eyes, which is a accountability software. So what my discipler and I would do, we would meet at Panera once a week and we would read God's word, and talk about my week. Talk about what had triggered me, we were also processing through my trauma, helping me find healing from that. And so we didn't really have any of the tools that I [00:32:00] share with women today. But we were just so honest, and I just loved the way she would just listen and ask questions. And I kind of model a lot of my ministry off of what she did. And she occasionally would share her story and give some wisdom, but it was just a lot of listening and asking questions and checking in and giving me that safe space to talk. And I always looked forward to that. I looked forward to each week knowing I was going to go to Panera and someone was going to ask me if I had looked at pornography and what my struggles were that week. It created that accountability. Because the reason why porn is so dangerous is because it's anonymous, it's addictive, it's accessible. You can access it from your phone and no one needs to know about it. And so that is why accountability is so important and helps break free of that shame because, you know, hey I'm going to talk to this person and they're going to ask me these [00:33:00] questions and I can't keep hiding. I can't stay in shame forever. So that was a huge part of it. And I think too, just practice over time. The more I shared my story, the more I talked about it, the more that shame kind of broke free, over time.

**Shelby:** Yeah, love that. Thank you for sharing your story. You know, another question that we get on this topic of shame, is someone who maybe is in the process of recovery from a pornography addiction. And they have not viewed pornography in a while. but then they have a moment where they do and they find it really hard to maybe just recover from that moment. I wonder if you could just talk to that person for a moment and give them some encouragement and advice.

**Joy:** Yes. So this actually just happened with a woman. She was in one of my groups and she found freedom and healing and she hadn't looked at it for a while. And also want to say too, that there is so much [00:34:00] more to healing than just not looking at pornography. So much of this is about our heart. We don't want to just change our behavior. We need to change our heart. And because if we just change behavior, then these same triggers are just going to cause us to do other things. Like binge Netflix, or just scroll on Instagram. And so really we have to get to the heart issues and work through that to really find freedom and healing and work through past trauma work through lies that we believe. All of these things. And so what happened for my friend is she's now even leading groups with us. She's amazing. And she has really found so much healing from her sexual trauma and her sexual sin. She's far along on her freedom journey, but one day she just texts me and says, man, I was triggered. And it just happened out of nowhere. And I didn't even realize what was happening. And I looked at porn. [00:35:00] And I didn't want to. And it felt so much like the scripture in Romans where Paul's like, I didn't want to do it, but I did it anyway. And it felt just like that. What I got to say to my friend is, you know, slip up sometimes are a normal part of recovery and it doesn't mean that you're a failure. It doesn't mean that you're right back to where you are. But the sooner that you get back up from that and run back to God, instead of remaining in hiding. I think that shows how mature you are in your recovery journey. And so that's what I encouraged her to do because it took her a few days to text me. And so I knew that meant she had been beating herself up for days. She had been feeling deep down in shame. And so I just encouraged her, "Hey, look at, what scripture showed us of the story of the two brothers, where the brother runs away and spends all of his father's money. And he comes [00:36:00] home, you know, He probably thinks his dad's gonna like hate him, but what is the dad do? He runs to his son with his arms open and that's a picture of God for us." And so I told her that, I said, "God is waiting with his arms open for you to come back to him and he's going to run to you. And so I just encouraged her in that. And so she spent the day, listening to worship music, journaling, getting back into that right relationship with God. And so, yeah, I think that's our best response is, well, if we sin, if, and when we mess up, the quicker our responses to run back to him, confess our sin and to restore our relationship with him, it shows how much more mature and further along we are on our recovery journies.

**Shelby:** I love that. You talked about how it's not just behavior modification, but it's a, heart change. I know you've mentioned a couple of tips and things here and there, but just what does that look like to experience that heart change and therefore [00:37:00] find freedom?

**Joy:** Yeah. So I think a great example is sometimes with different sins, you'll share and someone's response will be, you know, maybe you just need to pray more about it, or maybe you just got to join this recovery group. And while those are great things, like we do need to pray more and we do need to join groups. Sometimes this does, just become about changing our behaviors and not about changing the heart. And even when we look at like internet softwares we could have internet filters on our devices that completely blocks us from seeing things. And I actually still have them on my device just as a protection. You never know what could happen, but that could just be changing our behavior and not really getting down to the heart root issues. It could cause us instead, people, if they want to find something to look at, they can find it. For example, Instagram. Instagram doesn't block things I can go on there [00:38:00] and find things even with my internet filters. And so that would be kind of like trying to change our behavior, but we haven't really worked on the root issues. And one phrase that actually Dr. Juli Slattery, kind of talks about, she calls it sexual integrity. And that means really working on our integrity. Are we following God with how he created us sexually? Are we honoring him? So it's less about behavior modification and more about our heart, God working on our heart and then it'll change our behavior after that. And so a lot of that just comes from growing in our relationship with God. Spending time with him in the word, understanding his grace, understanding his character. If you think Shelby, like you and I just met, but say, you know, we wanted to grow in our . Friendship. It would take time for us to trust each other, to get to know each other, get to know each other's quirks. Get to know each other's favorite restaurants. So we would have to spend time [00:39:00] with each other. We'd have to go on walks. We'd have to text, talk on the phone, that kind of thing. It's the same with God. The more we spend time with him, the more we trust him. And the more that we trust that his design and plan for sexuality is good. Because oftentimes we don't trust it. We don't trust that what scripture says is actually best for us, right? We'd rather it be our way. And so we need that time of spending time with him to trust him. And so that's why it's a journey. It's a journey, and that's why we need community of other Christians in our life to help us on this journey.

**Shelby:** Yeah, I love that. So our sexuality is an overflow of our relationship with God. And I think a quote from Dr. Juli's book, Rethinking Sexuality, she said, Before we talk about what you believe about sex, we have to talk about what you believe about God. And I thought that was such a just poignant reminder that everything in our life, all that we do, flows from what we believe about God. And, if we believe his word to be [00:40:00] true and good and good for us. And so, thank you. That was really great insight that you just shared. I've just got a couple more questions for you. So, this is another question that we often get from people and they want to know, even after they found freedom from pornography addiction, there are some long-term effects. And one that people frequently mentioned is that they struggle with still seeing mental images, even if after they've stopped viewing pornography. And their question is just, can I be free from these after effects of pornography?

**Joy:** Yeah. So this really is the biggest, well, maybe not the biggest, one of the biggest impacts that this sin has. Is it changes your brain and these images do stay in your brain, not forever. There's hope. And I want to talk about that. But they stay in there because that's how God created us. He created us to see our spouse naked and unashamed and to [00:41:00] bond with them chemically in our brain. And so when we see these images on the screen from pornography, we are literally bonding to them. Because that is how God created it to be, and we are just experiencing it in a sinful, warped way. And so this is sadly a side effect. And so many of the women struggle with dreams. In my groups they'll share, Hey, I just can't stop having these dreams. Can't stop, sometimes they'll see like a, just a good looking person and immediately start, you know, lusting, objectifying them. And that is why this is a process of healing. Of literally rewiring our brain and restoring it. And a lot of this is hard work that I would suggest working through with a counselor. There's some great different types of therapy out there that can help with that. And also just a lot of prayer. This is what I literally did. And [00:42:00] man, even, I would say, every few months, I'll still have a dream that isn't a dream I would like to have, and it kinda, you wake up and you're kind of angry. Like why is this happening and frustrated and you think, wow, why is this still happening? And what I do now is when I wake up, sometimes it's in the middle of the night. Sometimes it's the next day. I'll just stop, and I'll just pray. And I'll say, "God, I can't control these dreams. I know this is just a result from my past, but I don't want to feel shameful and walk into shame today." Because we could easily let that ruin our whole day, right? We could let that shame impact our whole day, but God, you have healed me and you have redeemed me and you have put me in this ministry to help other people. I can't be taken out for the whole day, that's what the enemy wants. He doesn't want me to help other people find freedom. And so right there, I just pray. God help me not to feel that shame. And so I encourage the women that I work with to [00:43:00] do that same thing. And so, the good news is that over time, these dreams have been happening less and less, and these triggers happen less and less. And so it's a process and we can't really put a timeframe on it because all of us are different and all of our traumas are different and the types and amount of pornography that we viewed as different. But really working through all of this with a certified sex therapist, I would highly recommend a certified sex therapist, which people sometimes hear that and think, oh, do you have to be married to go to one? No, I went to one as a single person. Certified sex therapist doesn't mean you're talking about sex in marriage. It's more big picture sexuality, sexual trauma, and really helped me process through all this.

**Shelby:** That's great. so what would you tell the person listening, who feels stuck in this cycle of shame? They feel stuck in their addiction or struggle with pornography. What are your words of encouragement for them.

**Joy:** Yeah. So first of all, I just [00:44:00] want them to know they're not alone. There are other women struggling. You're not alone, and there is hope and freedom is possible. And I would encourage them to get plugged in to a church, a local community, and find a small group of other Christian women, who want to grow closer in their relationship with God. And then also finding a recovery group. It could be online, I know not every church has them in person, but the recovery groups help because you get to talk with other women who are going through the same thing. I would also encourage you to begin reading through some of these resources that we mentioned, maybe for your quiet time, spending time working through one of these books or devotionals. And educating yourself, educating yourself on what is really happening in your brain when you look at this. There's a great website called Fight the New Drug, and it's not a Christian website, but they have [00:45:00] great research and science and videos that explain what is exactly happening in your brain. What is happening in the world, meaning the sex trafficking that actually is happening in pornography. Oftentimes we don't think about the trauma that's happening to the victims that we're watching. And, that's really sad when you think about it, that you're actually watching someone be raped on screen. Most of the time, the performers in pornography have to be high or drunk to get through filming scenes all day. And I do find that when you educate yourself and you learn about this, you kind of feel empathy as you're watching these scenes. It makes you not want to watch them anymore. So, Fight the New Drug is a great website and resource, just to be further educated on that. So I would start there with education community and your personal relationship with God. And getting to know him and his character on a deeper basis.[00:46:00]

**Shelby:** Those are great tips. So our last question is just one question that we ask every guest who comes on and, you know, at The Daily Grace Co, we often say that the gospel changes everything, and we'd like to know, Joy, what has the gospel changed for you?

**Joy:** Yes, it really has changed everything. I love it. I love that you asked this, on the podcast. And so for me, the biggest change was, when I was in high school, and not understanding that I didn't have to earn God's love. I thought I had to be perfect and I kept sinning and messing up and couldn't be perfect. And I kept searching for love in all the wrong places and I never felt loved. And so the gospel changed my life in that I, for the first time realized that only Jesus could satisfy my desire to be fully known and fully loved even later in life getting married. Thinking my husband might be able to satisfy that a little bit more and while he's amazing, and I love my marriage so much, [00:47:00] really Jesus is the only one who can help me. He's the only one who knows me fully inside and out. Loves me fully inside and out. And the only one who can take away the shame that I experienced, on that cross. And so definitely has changed my life.

**Shelby:** That's beautiful. Thank you for sharing. You know, in closing, I was just wondering if you could pray over our listeners. We've probably got people listening who struggle with this issue or who love someone who struggles with this issue. And so would you just say a prayer over us and over our listeners as we close.

**Joy:** Yes. I'd love to, thanks Shelby. God, I thank you so much for this podcast and this ministry and all that they're reaching, all the people. And I pray for the listeners, I pray for the women who are struggling specifically with porn today. I pray that you would help them to take that first step, and confess and share with you God. And to find [00:48:00] safe Christians, to confess and share their story with God. And I pray that they would be pointed in the right direction back to you and your word And pointed to resources and God, I just pray that you would take away any shame that they're feeling, any shame that they think something is so wrong with them, that you'll never love them, God. Help us all realize that you love us no matter what, because we're all sinners in need of a savior, and God you are our savior. And I just pray That we would remember these truths and we would run back to you, knowing that you're waiting with arms wide open for us, God. We just love you so much. And we pray these things in your name ,Amen.

**Shelby:** Amen. Well, Dr. Joy, thank you so much for your time with us today. I'm sure that this has been not only a conversation in which people have learned a lot. But one that there'll be very encouraged from. We hope that you will take the time to connect with Joy, we've got all sorts of ways to connect with her linked in, the show [00:49:00] notes of this episode. And we are very much looking forward to the next episode in this series where we will talk about pornography addiction and recovery in marriage. So until then, we will sign off.