

# FamilyLife Blended®

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## Episode 97: Protecting Your Kids From Porn

Guests: Brian Goins and Gayla Grace

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**Brian:** So, if you want porn to be the sex educator of your kids, then don't talk to them about it. I think most parents have the idea, "Well, not my kid." We have given them the tool to have the most access to the most amount of porn in history. We hand it to them generally at a fourth, fifth, sixth grade level and we expect, "Oh, well, they wouldn't look at it, not my kid." It is becoming the leading sex educator of our kids.

**Ron:** This is *FamilyLife Blended*. I'm Ron Deal.

This is a donor supported podcast that helps blended families, and those who love them, pursue the relationships that matter most.

And today, we're talking pornography; we have to. I could just imagine somebody saying "Ron, why? Why do we have to talk about that on a podcast for blended families?"

Well, let me tell you, there's three main reasons I want you to tune in. Number one, whether you know it or not, pornography is everywhere. Your kids are going to be exposed to it if they haven't already and it is highly addictive. Did you know that there are over one and a half million porn sites in the world? And I think that's an outdated number and just one of them/just one of those one and a half million porn sites—and I'm not going to tell you what the address is for this—this one website reported in one year, 23 billion total visits—23 billion. Those people watched 92 billion videos—92 billion. That's 4.6 trillion hours of video. And that was one website.

And by the way, if you're thinking, "Man, those men are really watching," no, that's an outdated idea. Did you know worldwide 26 percent of porn users are females—26 percent. And that is a few years old; that statistic. It's likely more than that at this point in time. That's reason number one we've got to talk about this.

Here's reason number two: even if you're trying to protect your kids with healthy boundaries, their friends, and the other home for some children that they go to, may not be protecting them with those same boundaries. Listen folks, it's not whether or not your kids will view it, the issue is how much exposure will they have, have they already had, and you don't know anything about it. And that's just the kids.

Let's talk about you and me for a minute. What about you? You've been exposed to pornography as well. I know you have. I have; we all have. And how much of a grip does it have on your life?—on your marriage?

Well, there's a third reason that we had to talk about this subject. I really want you to tune in for a minute and hear me. There is a genre of pornography that may be tainting some of your family relationships more than you realize. Now, some of you are going “Genre; what do you mean?” Well, like movies have action and adventure, comedy, drama, romance, there are genres of pornography.

Did you know that in recent years, the genre of porn called stepmom porn was the number one most searched genre on this large porn site that I'm referencing?—number one. To make matters worse, stepsister was number three. Can you imagine the impact on a family when one or more persons in that home is sexualizing the step relationships?

Just think about that for a minute. What kind of position does that put a stepmother in if her stepchildren are sexualizing her? Imagine two step siblings navigating the same household/the same terrain, sharing bathroom from time to time, and having their bedrooms right next to one another and they are regularly being exposed to stepsibling pornography.

Do I have your attention yet? I'm glad you're listening. We've got to talk about this. Welcome to Episode 97: Protecting Your Kids From Porn.

Brian Goins and his wife Jen, have three children and love building into families. Brian serves as the senior director of strategic projects at FamilyLife®. He's a good friend of mine, and I've really valued his contributions through the years in so many ways to marriage, ministry and family ministry.

He's the author of *Playing Hurt: A Guy's Strategy for a Winning Marriage*. He's also the executive producer of a new video series that we're talking about on this episode called *Brain, Heart, World*. It's all about pornography and the impact of it on our brains, our hearts, and our world. Gayla Grace joined us in the studio.

Here's our conversation with Brian Goins.

Gayla, it's always good to have you back in the studio with me.

**Gayla:** Good morning; good to be here, Ron.

**Ron:** We're talking about really important stuff today. Pornography is everywhere. It's impacting every home—yours and mine and everybody else who's listing right now. So, it's an important subject, isn't it?

**Gayla:** Absolutely.

**Ron:** Brian, I've got to just start with this, okay. This series is fantastic.

**Brian:** Oh, good.

**Ron:** I really, really mean that. It is captivating. It is well produced, well shot—the video, the graphics, everything is really intriguing and interesting. I was telling somebody this morning, you know, I don't know what age appropriate it would be to start watching this, but a fourth grader would be interested and a sixth grader. Like you're going to hold people's attention with this.

I'm just going to say it upfront on this episode: every parent and every child should watch *Brain, Heart, World*. I really mean that. It is a game changer for people who don't really understand the impact of pornography on their heart and mind, but for parents and kids, it's a game changer to get conversations started. Thank you for producing this.

**Brian:** Well, we're going to have you join the marketing team, Ron. Thank you for that. Yes, I do feel like it's one of those things where you never know what you're going to create when you start something like that. I didn't know what it meant to be an executive producer of anything. I've watched a lot of movies, but I had never, you know, produced anything like that.

**Ron:** It's not as easy as it looks.

**Brian:** It's really not. I realized that mainly my role was to help get the creative team together and write some scripts and raise the money, so it was a—and the enemy did not want this out there and I think in some ways, awareness is our biggest problem. Once people see it, we're just getting great feedback, but it's a matter of people finding

it, because nobody is out there looking, “Hey, what's a good documentary about porn?” That's not on Netflix's search engine.

**Ron:** Right. And parents are not going, “How can I talk to my kids about porn?”

**Brian:** Right; no.

**Ron:** —the most awkward subject in the world that, you know, “I don't want to talk to them about sex, let alone porn. So why in the world would I want to do this?” So why would anybody listening want to have a conversation and use this series as an igniter for dialogue?

**Brian:** Right.

**Ron:** Why?

**Brian:** Why? I think the biggest reason is your kids are looking at it. I mean—and I think most parents have the idea, “Well, not my kid.” We have given them the tool to have the most access to the most amount of porn in history. We hand it to them generally at a fourth, fifth, sixth grade level and we expect, “Oh, well, they wouldn't look at it, not my kid.” It is becoming the leading sex educator of our kids. So if you want porn to be the sex educator of your kids, then don't talk to them about it.

**Ron:** So, Gayla, let's put on our parent's hats just for a second. Did you ever think you'd have talked to your kids about porn?—you know, way back when, when you first started.

**Gayla:** I didn't, but I did realize that it would have to be a conversation at some point. We did recognize that; and the other thing I was going to say is the value of it for youth ministers, who oftentimes youth ministers are guiding parents in how they help parent. This is a great tool for them also.

**Brian:** Yes. And Gayla, I appreciate you saying that because we designed it to go into public schools. So if there's people listening that are more from a faith background, you're not going to find anything from scripture. There's not going to be any religious references, but our goal really was to help change the conversation in the public forum. And so, if you're a youth pastor, if you're a parent that has a faith background, you can easily wrap the gospel around it.

**Ron:** Right.

**Brian:** The beauty of it is that what we've discovered is that science really is caught up to God's truth. It's caught up to scripture and the reason why God says, "Hey, flee from all sexual immorality," there's some solid reasons scientifically. There's solid reasons psychologically. And then even just from a purely world culture setting about what's happening with violence today towards women, then—and towards men—what's happening in the sex trafficking industry because of porn and how that's fueling it.

You've got three significant reasons: brain—what/how it affects your brain, how it affects your heart with relationships, and then, how is porn really having a ripple effect upon the world? That's enough for us to talk about.

**Ron:** Exactly; and we're going to talk about that. If you're listening, I want you to know we are going to talk about the substance of this series, and then we're going to talk about how parents can talk to their kids and just, how do you go about that? And what if you or your child is watching pornography? How do you undo that? How do you/what kind of conversation do you need?

My mind is racing in so many directions right now. I just want to echo and applaud what you just said. I do think that there are certain strategic moments in ministry for the youth pastor or somebody who's listening right now and they're thinking, "Wow, we definitely need scripture tied." Yes, absolutely. But there's an advantage sometimes to approaching a child from a quote secular standpoint, from a research standpoint, because I think sometimes Christians—adult or child, whatever the case may be—immediately disqualify some of our conversation about certain topics, simply because, "Oh, you're just saying that from a sin standpoint."

**Brian:** Right.

**Ron:** And so, the listener disqualifies the point you just made: "So this is a Bible thing.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** And you "You're just not savvy or enlightened enough." And so, if you come at it first from a research scientific standpoint and you reference, as you do in this series, people who really are not thinking biblically at all but they're just saying, "Look, this is unhealthy for you."

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** Then when you add “And oh, by the way, God was really looking out for you the whole time when He suggested there be boundaries around sexuality,” now, it’s sort of like, “Oh yes, God really does care for me.”

**Brian:** Right.

**Ron:** And those two things come together in a very powerful way; you agree?

**Brian:** Oh, absolutely. I mean, I want everyone to hear, Gayla, Ron, parents out there, youth pastors, God is pro-sex. He loves it. He created it and frankly, we don’t have enough great conversations about the joys, the benefits, the reasons why God created sex. Because He’s so much for it and wants everybody to experience joy and life more abundantly, we need to recognize there’s an enemy out there willing to kill, steal, and destroy. And he is doing that on a wide scale basis when it comes to the realm of sexuality.

And so for me, I just get excited about the fact that all of the research backs up exactly what God says in scripture. And I can approach that as a parent, as a teacher, as a health teacher, from a totally scientific range, or I could go and I could swing over to the gospel range and show “Well, ultimately, you’re only going to find life and joy in Christ anyway and this is why He says this. This is why He says flee. God never gives a command without a reason.”

This gives parents the ammo they need to have a legitimate conversation and move the conversation from, “Oh, I can’t believe you’re looking at that,” and it’s all shame based, to, “Oh no, let’s have a conversation. I know you’re probably looking at it and I know why you’re enticed by it.” I had that with my son who’s—I don’t even want to say his age right now—but I/because I’ve had this conversation with all three of my kids and when they stumble across it—which they will; just assume that—to be able to sit down and go, “Let me tell you why you’re so attracted by it.”

**Ron:** And I’m just mindful that this whole conversation goes in two directions. It’s not just our kids. Like that’s maybe the impetus of why we dive into this sort of thing, but this applies to me.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** You know, this applies to all of us as adults. We’re constantly exposed. I was exposed to pornography when I was 12 and, you know, back in the day, it was not nearly as graphic and as explicit as it is now. I look back based on some of the things

that I've learned from your series and go, "Okay, that's why I did what I did. That's what was chasing me," you know, as I would continue to grow up. Those are the thoughts that linger in my head, you know? Now, I get why that is, and I have a sense of what I can do about it. Like everybody listening right now has been exposed to pornography in one form or another.

**Brian:** Yes. Whenever I ask that question: when were you exposed to porn?

**Ron:** Yes, not if.

**Brian:** Not if; it's when. I mean, I was eight years old, and it was my girlfriend, which meant that we held hands and checked the box "Do you like me?" That's really the extent of my player age. You know, when I was in elementary school and she just took me—we were over at his house/her house and her dad wasn't there and pulled out a box from underneath his bed and said, "This is the magazines my dad looks at." I didn't really know what I was looking at, at eight, but those images never left me.

When I got exposed again at 11, and then when I hit puberty, the hunger was there and now the box isn't underneath the bed, it's in the back pocket of everybody. And so, if we don't have an answer as parents, if we don't have an answer even for ourselves—because I know there's parents struggling with it. That's/I think that's one of the reasons why a lot of parents don't talk about it is because they're dealing with it.

**Gayla:** The stories on the documentary are so good about giving examples of how empty they felt as pornography took hold of them. I think that's what is so important for kids to recognize the long-term effects of what happens with this. And yes, it's/those stories are such telling stories.

**Brian:** Yes. I was reading John 4 just yesterday and just about the woman at the well, and how Jesus was saying, "I want to give you water that will satisfy." Like "You'll drink from this water, and it won't satisfy." It just hit me. It's like pornography is the salt water of sexuality.

**Ron:** Salt water.

**Brian:** You keep drinking it and it just makes you more thirsty for the thing that's ultimately going to kill you. When I say kill, I don't mean that physically. I mean that it can kill relationship. It can kill, you know, in the sense of just your own freedom. You can become enslaved to it.

It has become the salt water of sexuality and the enemy is offering it up and people are drinking it—gallons every day. And to your point, Gayla, they always feel empty at the end of it, and they don't taste the real thing. They miss out on the real thing. That's what I hate.

**Ron:** Okay; so let's chase a little bit of the substance that's in the series, just to give people a preview to that very end, the emptiness of it, and as Gayla referenced, the how people just sort of find themselves in a place they didn't ever intend to go.

**Gayla:** Right.

**Ron:** Let's start with brain.

**Brian:** Okay.

**Ron:** The series is called *Brain, Heart, World*. And so, let's start with brain. What are we learning about how the brain responds to porn?

**Brian:** Yes. We're basically learning that what we've created when we created the internet—and like any technology, the porn industry knows how to leverage every form of technology for its own good. And what's driving so much of it is money. It's making more combined than Google, than Amazon and Netflix; it's making more money than all of those industries together.

**Ron:** Did you know your ability to charge a credit card over the internet was developed by the porn industry so that they could make money?

**Brian:** Exactly. So it's driven by that. They know what fuels people, they know what people crave, so they give it to people. And so, what we've discovered is we created unwittingly, the first visual drug; that porn/a brain on porn scans exactly like a brain on heroin and cocaine. It affects the same region of the brain and releases the same amount of dopamine as heroin and cocaine. Dopamine is a pleasure drug that we have in our brain, and it's a good thing. You know, whenever you do something that you like, like running, you have that runner's high. I've never gotten a runner's high, but people that run a lot—

**Ron:** I have runners low.

**Brian:** I have runners low. [Laughter] But when you eat something good—like we had a great meal last night—your dopamine gets released. When you are in love with



somebody, dopamine can get released. And so, but when—what narcotics do is it hijacks the brain to release an inordinate amount to where I keep wanting to get that high and I'll do whatever it takes to get that high.

So when we talk about that, we show how the reward center gets hijacked and how what's happening is we end up craving the very thing that will end up driving us away from the real intimacy. What's sad about porn is that it trains your brain to be, once you bond that with a sexual experience, you basically are saying to your brain, "This is how you experience good sex."

We have a lot of kids that might be virgins when they get married, but because they've been raised on a steady diet of porn, they've trained their brain to be aroused by pixels more than people. When they finally try to have a sex act with another person, they can't even get aroused because they've trained their brain, which is the biggest sex organ, to be aroused by scenes on video.

There's all kinds of stuff in that 30 minute. That's the thing, the other thing about these episodes they're short. They're like 27, 29 minutes. And so, you can watch it and then have a great conversation about it.

**Ron:** Yes. So what you just said made me think of butterflies and erectile dysfunction. Now, there's a bridge, right? [Laughter]

**Brian:** Yes, could you combine those? [Laughter]

**Ron:** In the video you report on this study that was done where this guy created cardboard butterflies so that the male butterflies would be attracted to the cardboard butterfly that was bigger and bolder and the colors were more bright and it basically replaced the actual female butterflies.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** And all of a sudden, you know, what they learned from that is that your brain is a drawn to what is exaggerated—

**Brian:** Exactly.

**Ron:** —and over time you prefer that over the real thing. In other words, it remaps the physical structures of the brain to create this response to that which is exaggerated not real. Porn is it just exaggerated in terms of its sex and the images that it portrays.

And so over time, when you/your body gets mapped in that direction, when you finally get married and have an actual sexual relationship, men are having in their twenties/having erectile dysfunction because they prefer cardboard over the real thing.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** That is frightening.

**Brian:** It is frightening. It should frighten us. And you don't see that on the erectile dysfunctional commercials.

**Ron:** It's an old guy.

**Brian:** It's an old guy. It's well, he you know, and the reality is the blue pills go into a lot of kids in their twenties. And whether you're married or not, you're having sex and it's like, "Why can't I get aroused?" or "I have to watch porn before I have sex with somebody." It's just/it's sad.

**Gayla:** It's also sad for the female on the other side, too. That they're affected as much as the male by what is going on.

**Brian:** It really is. I also want to be careful too, Gayla; I know you saw this. One of our first stories that we use is from a female, because what we're discovering is that 30 percent of porn users now are women. Now it's done differently. It's interesting how the porn industry knows what arouses women versus generally. I know we can't make total generalities on this, but the porn that's designed more for women is a lot different than the porn that's designed for men. But they can get hooked on it just as easily.

**Ron:** Generalities.

**Brian:** Generalities.

**Ron:** I see what you did there.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** That was really good.

**Brian:** Yes. You've got to watch out for those.

**Ron:** Yes. The woman that—one of the testimonies—she said that she didn't feel like—she got to a point where she didn't feel like anything was good in her life.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** I found that really interesting; that it's sort of like, “I don't feel good about this or me and this aspect of my life. I just don't feel good about anything in life.”

**Brian:** Yes; right.

**Ron:** —how that generalizes.

Back when I was a youth minister, 30 something years ago, [Laughter] I remember we made these connections between kids that were actively a part of our youth group and then suddenly dropped out. That very frequently we knew they had started engaging in sex with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or there was something sexual going on in their world that was creating shame to the point where they didn't want to hang out with Christian people/didn't feel worthy of being in that space, whatever. That made sense to them. But that was often one of those things we knew to start asking about. Well now, it's that times a hundred.

**Brian:** Yes. Well, and we've taken the shame out of the whole discussion, and I mean healthy shame. There was a healthy shame to this. And I think in a good way, it's—there's something internal that I know is off. What we've done is legitimize it in our culture to where now pornography, it's a harmless/it's a harmless activity. It's a victimless crime.

So what we try to do is show how no, the one that you you're harming is actually you.

**Ron:** Yes.

**Brian:** It's keeping you from the very thing that you're made for to experience; it's counterfeit. You're settling for counterfeit sex. And you want—you're made for more.

**Ron:** Bad for you—just this morning, Brian, I was reading some research that said men who use porn on a regular basis feel more lonely. They're more insecure and they're more dissatisfied with their appearance than men who don't.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** You're really harming you as well as some other things. That brings me to heart.

**Brian:** Sure.

**Ron:** *Brain, Heart, World*—Heart is about how does porn impact our relationships? How would you sum that up?

**Brian:** You know, it—I think the thing that we all long for as parents, I think, Gayla, you and Ron and I—I know for me, I have two main desires in my life for my kids—I've got three kids. I'm tearing up, even thinking about it.

- I want them to have a deep, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, their Creator. I want them to be able to connect with Him in such a powerful way that they realize that in Him is life and life to the fullest.
- I want them to have a deep, intimate relationship, if God so designs them to have that, with another person.

Now, maybe they'll be single. That's great if that's how God wants to gift them, but my hope is that those two things happen. Porn sabotages both of those. It disrupts the connection vertically because you feel shame. You feel the sense of there's something off here that my Creator didn't create me for this. I think that's an internal thing. If I keep using it to the point where I callous my heart, I move farther and farther away from God.

Same thing is true with pornography in a relationship. There is no psychologist that I have seen that I've—I know that there are some sex therapists that might say, “Hey, for a limited time, porn is good to help you in some way.” I don't trust a lot of that, but in general, I have yet to see a strong amount of psychologists come out and go, “Porn will always lead you to more intimacy.”

**Ron:** Yes, I've never heard that.

**Brian:** Have you ever—I mean, you guys are counselors. I mean, have you ever counseled, like, “You know what you guys need in your life right now is more porn”?

**Ron:** Right.

**Brian:** Because it's kind of like this. Porn, as we talked about, it heightens the expectations that reality can't meet. And what they say, you know, when there's a distance between expectations and reality, what's in between is disappointment,

disillusionment. That's what porn does is it, like, I'm made for you, you're made for me, but we're not matching up what I'm seeing. And if what I'm seeing is the strongest impression and it's fueling my brain and it makes me feel like that's joy and I'm not experiencing that with my spouse, I'm not going to connect with my spouse.

I remember we used to make a lot of jokes that we can remember. You know, we speak for Weekend to Remember for FamilyLife, and we used to make a lot of jokes from the stage about how men are more hungry for sex than women. We talk about how guys are always trying to chase their wife around the room. We started getting a lot of women that were coming up going "I'd kill for that."

**Ron:** "He didn't chase me."

**Brian:** "He hasn't chased me in years." And in my mind, I'm going "That's because he's chasing porn and porn is chasing him."

**Gayla:** I'm thinking about it from the parents' point of view where we don't have these conversations because it's awkward. We have visions of how awkward it's going to be; but how much more awkward is it if our child gets addicted and the things/the conversations where they have to go at that point get so much harder?

**Brian:** That's right, Gayla. I was talking with—can I say this about/like with a group of eighth graders? Because we talk about one of the main reasons why I did the documentary is because I was having so many of these conversations at conferences—like the downstream effect of the availability and accessibility of porn.

It's so hard once a couple's already been married for years and one of them is so hooked on it. They may not be addicted, but it's/they're going to it constantly. Because not everybody who looks at it will be addicted. I'm like "We've got to start earlier." Because the average age of first exposure is now—it keeps on going down. It used to be 11. Now, it's eight or nine.

I remember talking to a group of eighth graders and I was like, "Why do you think that 90 percent of your friends will be looking at this before they graduate from high school?" and an eighth grader, without any shame, just shouted out "Because it's awesome."  
Gayla: Wow.

**Brian:** And everybody laughed. I'm like, "Wow." Can you imagine? I mean, think about it. Why wouldn't it be awesome to an eighth grader? It's universally available, it's free, and why mess with a hassle of dating and trying to get to know somebody when online

porn is readily available. I can feel powerful. I can feel happy. I can feel joy in an instant. Now, it changes after that, but you know, it's awesome.

**Ron:** Yes. You know a subtext of this whole conversation that I just keep hearing I want to just comment on is, if we'll just think of the words toward or away. Does porn help you move toward—

**Brian:** That's good.

**Ron:** —people that are important in your life or away? It's away, because you know, it's that/you were talking about chasing—what is he chasing? Well, he's not chasing his wife around the house. He's chasing porn because—and here's the corollary, easy or difficult. Porn is easy. It's always here on my time, for me and exactly the way I want it. If I'm not interested in that anymore, I'll go find something that is, and I can find that as quick as I, a click, but difficult sometimes is relationships. It's the work that's involved. Porn requires nothing of me. Relationships require sacrifice of me.

So easy versus difficult; does that move me toward or away the people that are important to me in my world. You know, it's a no brainer. Porn is easy and it moves me away from people and I don't have to mess with them. I don't have to worry about all that work.

**Brian:** Right. Right.

**Ron:** So of course, that's the impact; and the crazy thing is for us as parents our awkwardness around the subject matter means we moved away from our kids. Our whole message here is we've got to move toward them in this, because if we don't, there's too many things moving us away from one another.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** You know one of the things that stuck in my head for years, years ago, Nan and I had a conversation with a man who, as a sex therapist, we respected him a lot. He worked in a church that was near where we were on staff and porn was sort of new way back then. I'll never forget him saying, "So have you guys ever thought about hiring a couple in your neighborhood to come to your house and have sex in the living room?" and it's like, "Oh *no*."

**Brian:** Yes. How about that for a leading question?

**Ron:** And then he said, “Well, but that's exactly what you're doing. You're hiring somebody come in on your terms and do something that moves the two of you as husband and wife away from each other toward something else. You've just put a wedge in your relationship, and you didn't even realize it and you would never do it if it was real people.”

**Brian:** No.

**Ron:** But you will do it if it's a graphic image.

**Brian:** There's something about that objectification of people. It teaches and trains us to be consumers of people and to have consumer sex. One of the biggest disconnects in the heart that I feel like with relationships is the way that porn is depicted.

And so, you think Dr. Zimbardo; he's a Stanford professor. He's not a believer to my knowledge, but he talks about how/where porn is different from a narcotic. Narcotics—you want more of the same. I need more heroin to get the high. With pornography, it's called arousal addiction. I want more and different.

When you look at the pornography and eroticism, especially as it relates to more men, porn trains you to want more and different. You don't look at the same porn you used to look at. You always get more and different and more deviant. What that ends up doing is it trains you.

It's like you think about marriage. The whole desire of marriage is I have a long-lasting relationship with one person. Porn trains me to love different people. It trains me to want different people. It trains me to be aroused by different people. Well, how am I going to be aroused by one person for a whole lifetime if my brain is going, “No, I need different to get aroused or to be satisfied”?

Eroticism for women, what's interesting—you know, you look at *Fifty Shades of Grey*/you look at any of those, it's all about one strong man chasing a/one woman.

So here you have two different versions of pornography and eroticism. One's training men to be aroused by multiple women and wanting and need and consuming and getting rid of. That's really what pornography is. I consume you. Then I move on to the next person, because I need something different. For a lot of women, it's one strong guy that's willing to do whatever it takes—to even abuse me because he wants me so much.

**Ron:** You can imagine a husband and wife that both have those different postures.

**Brian:** Yes. Those different images/those different platforms going through their head.

**Ron:** That's ripe for conflict because what they're ending up expecting out of one another is very different things.

**Brian:** Right.

**Ron:** You also brought up objectification. That's the World piece of *Brain, Heart, World*.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** I got to tell you of all three parts to this series, that's the one that hit me the hardest/that I had the least awareness of—the connection between trafficking, prostitution, and pornography. Tell our listeners a little bit about that.

**Brian:** Well, I was going to say, I was going to ask you two first. Like what was it that hit you about that? Because I'm finding that that is the one that's resonating with a lot of students as well.

**Gayla:** Well, for me, I had no idea that if somebody's watching porn, you just assume that's a model who has signed up to do porn. No, it could be sex trafficked victims who are being used for that. That is heartbreaking in my opinion.

**Ron:** The woman who came out of the porn industry who said, you know, they basically trick you into doing things that you didn't sign up to do, but if you want to get paid, you're going to have to do that sex act and you're going to have to do it right now. And just how that, you know, sends those people who are quote, making their own choices, to a place where they're not making their own choices.

Then the other piece that really hit me was I did not know that people who are involved in sex trafficking and grooming people for prostitution will use pornography to train them in what to do. I was just sickened by that.

**Brian:** Yes; yes.

**Ron:** Because again, they're training people to do what?—to satisfy the exact desires of the person, whether that's healthy for you or your relat—you know, there's no relationship involved in prostitution, but it just completely turns you into this thing that's worth only what you can do for somebody else.



**Brian:** Yes, you know, to see the, the gradual degradation of the porn industry; it used to be, you know, they have these porn conferences usually in Las Vegas and—

**Ron:** That makes sense.

**Brian:** —the porn industry would come together and there was this type of porn that was called Gonzo porn. Gonzo porn was just like the most deviant abusive. And by the way, 80 to 90 percent of porn images and porn scenes depict violence towards women. What that means is, is like, you know, you watch it, and the woman is getting—generally a woman, not always—but generally a woman is getting hit or has some type of violence towards her. It could be screaming; it could be yelling; it could be physical, and she responds with pleasure or no response at all.

A study out of the University of Arkansas and out of NYU said that basically 80 to 90 percent of porn is showing that violence and what that trains, and trains young kids, is that “Oh, she must like it when I hit her.”

**Ron:** Yes. I've seen reports that teen boys are more sexually harassing of teen girls in part because of that.

**Brian:** Yes; so when we look at all the domestic violence that's just skyrocketed recently, where is that coming from? You have to be trained to do that, so this Gonzo porn depicts all of that. It's very degrading.

And the porn industry, the Gonzo porn people would always be on the fringe. In fact, they didn't even want to let them into the facility because even from a porn stand, they were like, “Well, that's not us. That's too/it's too violent. It's too much. We don't want to feature. You guys can come, but you're on the fringe. Now, in—you know, not that I've been to these, but from what people have told me that are in the industry—now it's center stage.

**Ron:** Wow.

**Brian:** That the more violent, the more degrading, the more out of just, you can't even imagine the type of stuff that's being done; that's what kids can get into the cesspool so quickly. Like the Playboy/the gentleman's stuff, that's light compared to what most kids are being exposed to today. If you think that your kids are, when they look at porn, they're looking at what you looked at 30 years ago, it's night and day, and it's scary.

**Ron:** Man.

**Brian:** So going back to the world, I mean it, to fuel that industry, you have to train people and train you. You can't, people won't choose to do that, so you groom young kids. If you could really know that behind the screen of what you're watching the years that it took and the choices that were made to put that person on that screen in front of you, it wasn't their per—mostly, it was not their personal choice. And you would be incredibly ashamed that every watch/every click is fueling child trafficking. We have more slaves today than anytime in human history and 80 to 90 percent of those slaves are in the sex industry, fueling the porn industry.

**Ron:** Okay, Gayla, I just want to throw up right now.

**Gayla:** I know.

**Brian:** Yes. That's not the world we want to live in. That's the good news. Hey, we can fix that. We can change that.

**Ron:** But I'm sitting here, I'm a dad—you know, we have had through the years, lots of conversation. Our kids, you know, didn't miss this, but in their formative really young years, they were not exposed. But as they got older, they were, and so we had conversations. We had—there's always more exposure for your kids than you want them to have. I'm just taking this in, Gayla, and I'm just thinking “Man, it would be depressing to hear all this for our listeners thinking, you know, ‘What do I do?’”

**Brian:** Yes.

**Gayla:** I think we have to always know there is hope. It starts with having these conversations. I think about our college age son, who we've had these conversations, but I'm sitting here thinking, “Wow, he needs to watch these videos.” If nothing else, just to understand as he is in ministry himself, as a leader of Bible study groups, and he needs to be instructing these young men of what the end result of porn is. These videos depict it better than anything I've ever seen, and just the sadness and the emptiness and the devastation of pornography is so sad.

**Ron:** One last comment, and then let's turn the corner and talk about parenting. What do we do? I just want to make an observation that there's a lot of us, even as adults, who are trying to guard our heart and our eyes that can still be pulled in; because I think the porn industry is so savvy. They know they can't just throw explicit right at people.

But what they can do on Facebook is, you know, in the reels and images and videos that play, they can—it's like an appetizer, like when you walk into grandma's house, and she's been cooking all day. Wow. All of a sudden, I'm hungry because you just smell the aroma, and it just brings you in.

And likewise, social media, there's just enough, you know, images and eroticism that it just makes you even a little more hungry.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** And that is not on accident; like they are very intentional to draw people in with free, free, free, free, free until the cost is too great.

Okay. So obviously we want to try to protect our kids. I'm thinking, "Why do parents put their heads in the sand about this?" That's one question. I'm also thinking, "How do we proactively protect our kids from what's available to them?"

**Brian:** Yes; yes. The whole thing about putting your heads in the sand, that is the number one parenting philosophy when it comes to pornography. [Laughter] You're not alone; everybody does it. I do it. Nobody wants to have the conversation. Like it's so awkward. I remember having the conversation with one of my sons and I felt like I was doing really, really well.

I felt like we were really connecting, and I said, "So son, when you see these images, will you be okay to come up and talk to me about it?" He just went/he just shook his head. [Laughter] I was like, "Man, I thought I was connecting," and he is like— You could see him just shrink into the seat. It was in a car so he couldn't get out of the car. We were driving; that's where you have these conversations.

**Ron:** I was going to say that is a strategy there.

**Brian:** That is a strategy; yes. My dad did that to me. You know, like when—too late to have the sex conversation, but when we did have the conversation, we were driving at 70 miles an hour. You can't get out of that room. [Laughter]

**Ron:** I call that a captive conversation.

**Brian:** Captive audience, right.

**Ron:** Captive audience.

**Brian:** And honestly, that's where these conversations have to happen. They're not going to offer you anything. Kids aren't going to come up and go, "Gosh, Mom and Dad, I can't believe I looked at this." They won't; you're going to catch them. God's going to catch them in some way, or you're going to be proactive.

And so proactive parenting is got to be the—it might move into that awkwardness. It's the worst feeling. Just recognize it and say, "Okay, my alternative is that I'm going to let porn be the sex educator of my kid. I'm going to let porn define how they view love, how they view intimacy, and how they're going to experience sexuality."

**Ron:** Okay, so the three of us, let's just brainstorm real quick what proactive might look like. Alright, just popcorn ideas.

**Brian:** I'll just start. I mean, honestly, we tried to make it easy. Like you got three videos; they're free to watch. We have questions that if you get a license, you can download the workbooks and all that kind of stuff.

It's pretty easy to have these conversations. We're like, "Let's watch it together and let's talk about it."

**Ron:** Boom.

**Brian:** I think the second thing I would say—sorry, you guys can jump in—prepare your story. Like if you're not willing to talk about how you've seen it, because you've seen—99 percent of us have seen it. How did you feel when you looked at it? Why did you like looking at it? Let them see because they see us and view us like, "My parents would never have done that."

**Ron:** But Brian, to do that, I'm going to have to admit to my child that I'm a sexual being and we want to avoid that as much as we can. [Laughter]

**Brian:** That's right.

**Gayla:** So true.

**Ron:** So how do I overcome my desire to be asexual to my children?

**Brian:** Right; right.

**Ron:** I'm seriously asking this on behalf of everybody listening right now.

**Brian:** Yes; and nobody wants to think of their parents as sexual beings. I want that image out of my head.

**Gayla:** Right!

**Ron:** It's just, is it courage? Like, it's just courage to say "Yes, I've got to own this so that I can enter this space with my kid," I guess.

**Gayla:** And recognize that you don't have to get real explicit with the language. I mean, they know what you were trying to say nine times out of ten. Unless there are questions that come up and you can see really, they are having trouble understanding, but I just don't see that happening. I think they have been exposed and the conversation doesn't have to go maybe as deep as we think, and that's why we avoid the conversation.

**Brian:** Right. I think we remember that the gospel is there to help power us, right. You know, when God said to Joshua, you know, be strong and courageous for I will be with you always and He's sending them into fortified cities. And you think about your kid as a fortified wall and what's that fortification around him? Shame: "I don't want to talk about this." And that feels like there's walls around our kids. God can bring those walls down. It won't be easy. It won't be perfect. We're going to stumble.

You know, Jesus said, I will be with you always. Just remember, you know, 360 times in the Bible God says, "fear not." Why would he say "fear not" if we're not going to have fear? I have fear approaching these conversations. I don't want to do it. But keep thinking about the alternative. What's my alternative if I don't move into that space?

**Ron:** Okay. So far, proactive strategies I'm hearing. Gayla said don't worry about having to use explicit terms and worry about not connecting. You know, go ahead and talk and share where you're comfortable and you'll connect with them.

I hear you say use the videos, get out in front of the conversation. Let that be something that bridges into the uncomfortable dialogue. The videos do the teaching; that's the really cool part. You just then sort of process with them a little bit. Gayla, you got another one?

**Gayla:** Brian, I'm wondering about, do we preface the conversation with our child by saying, "I love you. This is going to be an awkward conversation, but I love you too much to not have this conversation. And so here we go."

**Brian:** Yes. And just remind—you know, practice your non-shock face.

**Gayla:** [Laughter] Oh gosh.

**Brian:** Like just practice. You know, there's a parent that they came back from shopping one day and they didn't find the shoes that they wanted, so the son said—and he's like probably five or six years old—and he's like, “I want to find those shoes. Can I look online?” She's like, “Yes, sure. Here's my iPad.” Gives him the iPad; comes back, he's like, “Mom, these aren't the shoes,” and he's showing pictures of explicit genitalia because the shop they went to was Dick Sporting Goods.

All he did was type in the first part of that. You can imagine what came on the iPad.

**Ron:** Yes; that's right.

**Gayla:** Wow.

**Brian:** And so, she just tosses the iPad against the wall; breaks it.

**Ron:** Oh no.

**Brian:** And is like, “I don't want my kids exposed.” It's like, no, just recognize the world/the enemy is going to expose them. So, it's okay, Gayla, to your point. It's okay. I love you. We live in a fallen world. You're going to see stuff that you never were intended to see, and use Psalm 119:37, “Train my eyes to not look at worthless things and teach me to find life in your ways.” We've got to show this is worthless. This porn, all of this, is going to help you feel worthless. It's going to create a relationship that's worthless and it's going to have a sex life that is worth less than what porn is promising.

**Ron:** To the non-shock face and practicing that, I'm thinking of Psalm 1:31 that talks about how I've calmed and quieted my soul like a weened child. Like we have to self-regulate in the midst of things.

And you know, we've talked on this podcast before about when you're having hard conversations with your kids, be matter of fact about it act as if it's no big deal. Yes. You're acting. Yes. You're an actor winning a, you know, a golden globe at that moment in time, but you're acting like it's not a big deal because then that helps the child feel like it's not such a big deal. When you freak out, they freak out and then neither one of you

is listening and you're all falling apart. So that really is an important discipline for us as parents.

I think another strategy is get out in front. Like if your kids are young, oh my, start this conversation when you're giving them a bath, and just talk to them about how beautiful God made their bodies and how great that is. Just start with that general positive body image, dialogue, and conversation that is really also helping you practice talking about things that one day will include sexuality. So, as they grow, you just have these little mini conversations over and over and over again. And so, when they're seven or eight, you're starting to talk about guarding our eyes and things people look at and how we cherish people's worth rather than just their outward appearance.

**Brian:** So good.

**Ron:** That leads to the dialogue then about porn when they're a little bit older, and you've got to beat it to the punch though. I mean, if you wait until they're 15, they've already potentially had years of exposure. So that's, if your kids are small, that's a strategy. If they're older, my goodness, just have the courage. I mean, I think my kids would tell you, "My dad makes us so uncomfortable."

I, the other day, after watching your series, Brian, I walked into my 23-year-old son's room. He's finishing college online, at home, pandemic, you know, the story and he's got his best friend in his room with him. I stuck my head in and said, "Hey dudes, you guys got to watch this series on porn. This documentary's really good. It's all about how it affects the brain and the heart."

I'm talking to two young men that I know have had exposure to porn/have to have had. I kind of think maybe my son's friend has had more exposure, not really sure about that. I don't care if they're uncomfortable; somebody's got to say this. I just feel like I've got to be the one to do it. I sort of step in. I say that thing. I walk out; trying to plant seeds constantly. I think that's a part of being proactive.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Gayla:** Sometimes too, I think that we are trying to rely on filters. I hear parents talking about, "Oh, here's the best filter that your child should have on their phone." We cannot rely on that. Our kids are still going to have access to porn, and we just need to/we need to understand the filter's not going to do it.

**Brian:** I'm so glad you said that because that was really the goal behind this.

Think about it like this. I could go up to my kids right now and go, “Hey, do you guys want to have a smoke? Let's go smoke cigarettes together,” and my daughter's going to go, “Why would I want a cancer stick?” [Laughter] Now, back in the seventies, there were smoking lounges in high school, right?—seventies and eighties. Something happened in the eighties where we changed the conversation and we're going to show, this is what smoking actually does to you. And now, I can't convince my kids to have a smoke even if it was considered cool.

In the same way, if we don't train our kids to be the first filter—like they need to be the first filter and have an internal understanding of “Why would I want to look at that?” Instead of changing the conversation from “Dude, check this out” to “Dude, that's just not cool.” Like, “This is what it does,” and man, that's hard with porn because it's so enticing. It's so titillating, and then when you understand all that is, is dopamine. That's why you feel that way. Of course, it looks good. Of course, you want that because it's releasing this dopamine.

But think of it like cotton candy. Cotton candy tastes good but if that was all my diet/if every meal was cotton candy, you're not going to be satisfied with your life. And so, we've got to do that to help kids. This is why we created this series to become that first filter and to change the conversation in their own world. Because top-down communication: “This isn't good,” “You shouldn't do this,” it's never worked for teenagers.

**Ron:** Okay, let's close with this big word: neuroplasticity.

**Brian:** Good word.

**Ron:** Don't ask me to spell it. It's in the series. You talk about it. We know the brain can remap, can restructure, can reform. Just because you put some neurological ruts in your brain that are attracted to images that porn brings does not mean you're stuck with those ruts the rest of your life.

**Brian:** Amen.

**Ron:** Because the brain grows, and changes, and you can heal that sucker. That's really good news. For anybody right now who is listening and is going “I struggle with porn” or “I got a kid. I know they're in a hard, difficult place,” how do we help encourage neuroplasticity? What are some things, some elementary things, that parents might be able to do?



**Brian:** Yes. I think he talks about it being the brain is malleable; it can change. It's more like that. In fact, the illustration he uses is it's like tofu. Imagine you just press in, and it can—if you kept pressing it eventually would create that rut. But if you press on another side or press something different, you can change. You can remap. It's so good, but it's got to be very intentional.

I think the hope is, is just like with God, God can make all things new, and He can make this new. He can help us experience life in His ways again.

**Ron:** Literally renewing your mind.

**Brian:** Literally renewing your mind. Why does Paul say to the church at Corinth that you need to capture every thought? I like that idea of capturing thoughts because you can't stop the desires. You can't stop the longing, you know, for, “I really want to look at that,” but you can capture that thought and go, “Okay, let's reframe it.” Let's go, “Okay, this is what's going to happen when I start looking at it. This is what I'm going to feel. I'm going to feel excited. I'm going to feel desired, but then I'm going to feel a sense of loss. And then eventually, if I keep going down that path, this is what it's going to look like.”

So keep framing the end in mind, and then really, you've got to have pattern interrupts. If that means that for a time your kids—you know, you work with your kids to go, “We're going to—” I did this with one of my kids. Internet is not on his phone. You know, and we said, “And social media is—” you can/it's so easy now for a parent to control a kid's phone. Apple has made it easy.

**Ron:** Right.

**Brian:** All of them made it easy. We just have to dig in and discover it and go, “Let's be the pattern interrupt for our kid.” Get them involved in other things; you know, as far as find out those things that do release dopamine in a good way. Is that music for your kids? Is that sports for your kids?

Is that a different type of, you know, doing games with your kids? Like figuring out different ways of “How do I release dopamine, so it's not just left in this six-inch screen in my hand?”

**Ron:** Gayla, what do you think the first response is? So a parent discovers their child is looking at porn—maybe I should ask it this way: what's the first response we don't want to take? [Laughter]

**Gayla:** I would say denial, because then you do nothing. You're paralyzed; you don't want to believe it. And maybe you think, "Oh gosh, that was a one-time thing. I'm sure they're not really doing that all the time." Denial would be the worst because more than likely they are doing it more than you realize if you've discovered it.

**Ron:** And the polar opposite would be the freak out, you know, yell and scream at your kid, "How can you do this?"

**Gayla:** —shame them.

**Ron:** You're such a horrible—yes, shame.

**Brian:** Which guarantees you'll never have a follow up conversation.

**Ron:** There you go.

**Gayla:** Right.

**Brian:** I mean, that's what that guarantees, and so to practice that non-shock face. Again, prepare your story. I've actually got a series coming out with RightNow Media—should be out by the time this podcast airs—

**Ron:** Really?

**Brian:** —that's about prepping parents for this conversation. And it's a short five-part series that we use some of the clips from the documentary, but it really wraps the gospel around parents and preparing parents to have this conversation.

I talk about preparing your story, preparing your will—like the idea that I'm going to have to move into that awkwardness—and then preparing your mind. The fact is that we have so much at our fingertips, that we can know this. We don't have to go into a conversation without having the tools to talk reasonably about why this impacts their heart, why it impacts the brain, why it impacts the world. We have all those answers. We don't have to guess anymore.

And then, I think preparing other people around you. You know, Ron, this is where the body of Christ comes in. I really want other people to tell their stories to my kids. I want other people speaking truth into the life of my kids. This is a battle we're going to be in, and every great battle has great allies. And so, who are the people coming in so that I'm not feeling—like as a parent, I think one of the hardest things about this is I feel alone.

Let's get other people into the conversation with my kids, whether it's my youth pastor, whether it's my friends and their kids and we watch the series together and have a conversation.

**Ron:** You know, Brian, that's one more strategy. It just dawned on me. It's so much easier to talk to your kids about really uncomfortable things when there's a group of people in the room. Let a video shown to 30 students sitting with parents, so now it sort of softens it; it spreads it out a little bit. It's not you and me looking each other in the eye. If that's just super uncomfortable for you, this is another way of getting the information to them. It's a part of a bigger class and other people are part of the discussion, *and* you're creating opportunity for other people to step into your child's life.

**Brian:** Yes. Can I say this? Just a caveat on that, that was so helpful for me and my son. We were having breakfast with this guy. He's a great FamilyLife advocate and he's in his twenties. He's married, has a couple small kids. And my son—I've tried to train my kids to ask good questions of adults like that are farther down the road and so I was actually proud of my son that came out with a question like, "What do you wish somebody had told you when you were my age, especially as you're going into a relationship?"

I was like, "Wow, that's a good question, man. I wish I had asked that." I was so glad what this guy said. I couldn't have penned it better and I wasn't planning this. I didn't pay for him to do this. He said, "I wish somebody had told me that I would have a desire for pornography in my marriage after I got married. Because I thought once I got married that my wife would satisfy all my needs sexually. I found some of my biggest struggles with porn was after I got married."

Why? Because he's realizing that he is that arousal addiction—I need more and different. My wife's not satisfying me, so I need to go to something different to feel that that sense of hunger and that sense of, you know, that dopamine release. Sex wasn't doing it for him.

Afterwards we got in the car, and I was like, "Did you like the/how'd you like the conversation?" He's like, "I was really shocked by what he said about how his desire for porn went up *after* he got married." That's what he heard. That's what he took away. That's the benefit of somebody else's story speaking in the life of your kid.

**Ron:** This is the idol porn can play in all of our lives. Like any other attachment, separate and apart from who God is, when we start relying on that thing instead of God to help us do life, it's an idol. And whether that's an idol that moves you away from your

spouse or moves you away from yourself, ultimately it moves you away from God. The question we all need to learn to ask in our walk with Jesus is, “Lord, help me deal with this temptation/help me deal with this awkward moment.” Maybe it's a sexual relationship with your spouse and it's difficult and challenging.

And remember difficult is difficult, but easy is easy; and that makes this temptation to move towards something easy. All of a sudden, that is the thing that solves your problems. And no, it does not. God is the one who helps you solve your problems. Pursue Him, not idols.

**Gayla:** And also, as parents, ask for wisdom/pray for wisdom. God will give it to us. As we try to broach this subject/this awkward subject, just continue going before the Lord, before we ever start to have the conversation and He'll guide us through it.

**Brian:** That's good.

**Ron:** Brian, thanks for working on this project, Brainheartworld.org; very valuable. Every parent listening and every child that is connected to those parents should watch this series. Thank you.

**Brian:** Yes. Thank you, Ron, for making it available. And again, I think one thing I want parents to realize there's no triggers. It's safe to watch.

**Ron:** It's not salacious.

**Brian:** It's not salacious. If you have/everybody asks what's the right age? and you really need to know as a parent “Is my kid ready for this?” And I can't speak to that. I will say we built it so that it could be watched in a seventh-grade health class all the way up through college. If your kids are in college, there'll be some cheesy parts, but it's—again, it's for junior high/high school. Some kids are more mature; they could do it at fifth or sixth grade, but that's how it was designed. So appreciate it, Ron, for letting me come on and talk to everybody about it.

**Ron:** Thanks for being here.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ron:** You've been listening to Gayla Grace and my conversation with Brian Goins. I'm Ron Deal, and this is *FamilyLife Blended*.

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You know, last week was our ministry equipping conference, the *Summit on Stepfamily Ministry*. If you missed it, the show notes are going to tell you how you can access what we call our All-Access Digital Pass, where basically you can get audio and video access to the major presentations at that event. It will also connect you to our *Certificate course in Blended Family Ministry*. If you want to help others in your church or community, tap into those resources. It'll equip you to do the ministry that God has placed before you.

Next time, we're going to hear from Sabrina McDonald about dating as a single parent. I hope you'll join us.

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