

SURFING
FOR GOD

DISCOVERING THE DIVINE DESIRE
BENEATH SEXUAL STRUGGLE

DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS

MICHAEL JOHN CUSICK

"A dangerous and beautiful book, filled with hope. Give it to every man you know."

—JOHN ELDREDGE

author of *Wild at Heart* and *Beautiful Outlaw*

Surfing for God Discussion Questions

Introduction: What's Better than Porn?

1. "The pursuit of purity is not about the suppression of lust, but about the reorientation of one's life to a larger goal." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Is this a new idea to you? Have you pursued purity by suppression? What might it mean for you to reorient your life? Take a moment to write down some thoughts, words, or stories that come to mind as you reflect on this quote.
2. How do you relate to the Skylark who exchanged feathers for worms and has lost his ability to fly?
3. When the rabbi said to the disciple, "I have seen your heart. In your heart there is a song. And with you heart you will learn to fly", what do you think he meant?
4. In what ways do you identify with the "lather, rinse, repeat" analogy?
5. In the battle for freedom Michael describes two options we are familiar with: suppress our passions, or indulge our passions. How can you relate to this? Have you ever had the experience of a third way?
6. What would it mean for you to "fly"?
7. The final question of the introduction is, "Are you ready to take this barrier of porn and let it become a bridge to life?" Do you believe that God could actually *use* what evil has intended for your destruction and turn it into a bridge to life and knowing Him more intimately? What might it look like for you to take a step toward this right now?

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Chapter 1: Getting Your Feathers Back

1. Michael describes in the opening pages of this chapter the “degree” to which his addiction had escalated. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being severe) where would you place yourself on this same scale?
2. Can you relate to the comment that Michael’s counselor offered to him, “You strike me as a very lonely man.”
3. How do you connect with Gerald May’s assertion that self-deception is one of the chief characteristics of addiction?
4. “No falling apart. No weakness. Hold it together whatever the cost...the cardinal rule for my fledgling faith.” Does this quote resonate with what the church has taught/with what you have believed that a Godly man looks like?
5. Have you ever tried to sincerely discard porn like Michael burned his porn magazines and then continued to struggle? Why do you think the struggle continued?
6. C.S. Lewis talks about the danger of coming to love the prison. Why would any of us love to be imprisoned?
7. “Porn keeps us from flying the jet, getting in the game, or sailing the high seas. All because we settle for something that doesn’t exist and will never satisfy us...God designed you to be a hero - to focus your strength and courage on behalf of something and someone bigger than yourself.” As you read these words how does your heart respond?
8. Is it possible that you are broken *and* glorious all at the same time? If so, what does this mean?
9. “Donald Miller suggests that we are trees in the story of a forest. And that story of the forest is better than the story of the trees.” Each tree is vital to the creation of a forest but the forest is the frightening life or death adventure we are called to enter. What would it look like to engage an adventure far bigger than yourself out of a deeply personal place of calling?

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Chapter 2: It's Not About Sex

1. What do you believe is the underlying reason that pornography has so much power over you?
2. "Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God." - GK Chesterton.
Take just a moment and reflect on what you think this means.
3. Porn offers life, adventure, and to meet our deepest longings without cost or risk. Does this ring true to you?
4. On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the strongest, how much do you feel like a strong man? What about in the presence of a woman?
5. The broken promises of porn again are:
 1. Validation of our manhood without requiring strength
 2. Sexual fulfillment without relationship
 3. Intimacy without risk and suffering
 4. Passion and life without connection to soul
 5. Power over women without responsibility and humility
 6. Comfort and care without depending on others

Put these in the order that feels most relevant to you personally. Now take a hard look at the top two that hit closest to home - why are these two needs so important to you? What story or stories come to mind where your true desire (the first part of each phrase) was stolen or thwarted?

6. Can you identify, as Raymond did, the hunger and thirst for something legitimate and good under the surface of porn? Take a few moments and try. In this process of finding freedom and wholeness, you *must* find your good heart and we will get to this more in chapter 6, but shame will not take you there.

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Chapter 3: Insatiable Thirst

1. Are you aware of wanting something so much deeper than what you know or currently experience? Do you recognize this desire as being good or bad?
2. "If Thomas Aquinas's words are true - that every sinful behavior is rooted in a legitimate God-given appetite - then identifying those God-given longings must be our first order of business." Write out 2-5 deep longings in your heart and share them with your group.
3. For Micah, "masturbation was the only outlet in his life that came close to meeting his legitimate needs." Do you recognize the thirst beneath his struggle? Further, do you recognize the thirst beneath yours?
4. When any person is caught in the midst of an addiction, it can feel utterly exhausting to stop, try to name and identify the real thirst because addiction numbs desire. But it *IS* there. Will you do the hard work now to struggle to find and name your thirst? See p. 30-31 of the book for help.
5. Are you one who tends toward demanding that your desires be satisfied, or toward disowning your desires?
6. "Do you believe in your heart of hearts that when you indulge in porn, fantasy, or masturbation, your desires are actually *too weak*?"
7. Can you relate to the *demand* that your desire be satisfied - moving from lover to *consumer*? How about *misplaced* desire?
8. Take a few moments to reflect and write: Where is it that your heart has been broken? Where has your soul experienced drought, disease or poor growing conditions?

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Chapter 4: Gathering the Broken Pieces

1. Have you ever experienced a day like Michael's on July 10, 1994 with a spouse or loved ones? If so, what was this experience like for you? Are there any in your group who would be willing to share?
2. Do you realize that your "behavior" is not the real issue? Is this a new idea to you?
3. Do you trust God to provide for your deepest needs? Where do you rebel against God by taking control of finding alternative ways to meet your own needs apart from Him?
4. Where do you feel inadequate? What would it look like for you to move into and toward that inadequacy rather than hiding or escaping it? Will you risk *needing other men? God?*
5. Name one primary wound of your growing up years - either a wound of commission or omission.
6. As you think about your deepest needs, woundedness and fear of inadequacy, try to name in five words or less what the lie of the enemy is toward your soul. [Insert your name here] is a
_____.
7. What might it look like for you to lay down (surrender) the broken pieces of your life to God? He cannot heal what you will not let go of.

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Chapter 5: Exposing the Counterfeits

1. Do you recognize pornography as being a counterfeit good (i.e. not the real thing you are created for and to enjoy)?
2. Take a few moments to write down any and all legitimate good that you can identify underneath your desire for porn.
3. If you are caught up in the middle of your addiction, this question could prove to be difficult but please try anyway. When you do not escape to your addiction what are the feelings, urges, stories that begin to come up within you? In other words what *truth* or pain rises to the surface that you want to deny or suppress?
4. Tim Keller wrote: "A counterfeit god (idol) is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living...An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought." Can you relate to this quote? If so, how?
5. Take some time and make a list of as many things as you can think of that porn has cost you - relationally, financially, spiritually, etc.
6. Do you come to the end of this chapter with hope? Despair? Something in the middle? Do you believe that "it is never too late to exchange the false intimacy of images and illicit encounters for authentic relationships and God's gifts."?
7. Tim Keller writes again, "What we need is a living encounter with God." What do you think of this as being the solution?

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Chapter 6: Shame and Core Beliefs

1. “While guilt says, ‘I have *done* wrong,’ shame says, ‘I *am* wrong.’” Do you recognize how *extremely* different to the core these two beliefs are? What is the outcome of each of these core beliefs?
2. Can you imagine what it would look/feel/be like to offer yourself to your spouse, children, & friends as a kind of blessing knowing that what you are offering is indeed very good?
3. What do you hide behind? Money, wit, talent...being overweight?
4. Do you see that shame never comes from God? How does shame *work* for you to remain hidden from God and others?
5. Michael writes, “But how can He transform our brokenness into wholeness when we insist on concealing it? When we hide, we limit God’s ability to reveal and heal those parts of us that desperately need the touch of the Great Physician, the Wonderful Counselor, and the Comforter. *When we desperately try to maintain our appearance, we end up delaying our rescue.*” What might it mean for you right now to be honest and let go of maintaining some appearance? “Hiding and performing and pretending prevents us from receiving what our hearts long for. A false self cannot be loved.”
6. In the section on core beliefs (p.75-76), which of the four core beliefs identified for a sex addict do you *most* identify with and why - where did you “learn” this to be true of you?
7. Do you hear the voice and question of God to you right now, “Where are you?” as being condemning or inviting?
8. If the voice of shame could be silenced, what do you think the voice of Love might say to *you*? What do you long to hear? Who can you trust with you? Will you risk inviting someone you trust into your shame this week?

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Chapter 7: The Soul Snare Path

1. Does it make sense that knowing the pattern and issues contributing to your obsession with porn is empowering? If so, how?
2. “Carl Jung...wrote that all neurosis is caused by the avoidance of necessary pain.” Do you see how the avoidance of dealing with the truth of your story and brokenness fuels the fire of dealing with it in very unhealthy ways? That could be something like porn or something as “seemingly innocent” as entering the ministry for many the wrong reasons. It’s like trying to hold a beach ball under water...either let it up or it will pop out sideways but either way you cannot keep it under water.
3. Make a list of your *external* and *internal* triggers. Share a few of these with your group.
4. Michael lists three phases of becoming preoccupied with porn:
 - 1) *Passion is awakened*
 - 2) *Attention is focused*
 - 3) *Arrangements are made*

Take a few moments to write out the scenes of one recent scenario where this preoccupation took place. Will a couple of brave souls share your experience with your group?

5. Michael talks about surrendering our hearts in ways that “diminish us”. We attach ourselves to some thing, person, or process. We are ensnared. He writes, “The harder the victim tries to break free from the snare, the tighter it becomes.” It’s like those chinese finger traps - the harder one pulls the tighter the lock. Can you identify with this trap?
6. What are the sentences of shame that you hear in your head and heart after you have “acted out”?
7. What are the ways that you have shown penance in the past after acting out?
8. What is one thing - somewhere to go, an activity to do, something to see, a conversation to have, where you could risk being captivated by the beauty of God’s love this week *instead of turning to porn?*

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Chapter 8: Your Good Heart

1. Gerald May writes, “The freedom question, then, is not whether we can do whatever we want, but whether we can do what we most deeply want.” Where have you seen “freedom” abused in the church or culture at large as it has been defined as doing “whatever we want” as in the first part of this quote.
2. Take a few moments to close your eyes and imagine Jesus in flesh and blood right at this moment kneeling in front of you. He simply asks, “[your name], what do *you most deeply want?*” How would you respond?
3. List the ways that you can personally identify with where and how your heart has bent away from God.
4. What have you been taught or have understood “the good news” or “the gospel” as being about?
5. Michael writes, “for the man who has trusted Christ, this (the struggle with porn = their heart is desperately wicked - referring to Jeremiah 17:9) is a paralyzing mistake. God has given him *a new heart*. His heart is no longer desperately wicked. **This is no small theological side issue.**” Do you understand the gravity of a person’s understanding of the gospel message and the implications this has on the way that a person lives?
6. How have you tried to “shut off the faucet from the cesspool”? Where have you known, tasted of “turning on the faucet of trust”?
7. Read through the bullet points on page 102. Do you believe this? If not will you stop now and ask God to help you to believe what He already says is true of you? And like Jacob who would not let go of God as they wrestled ‘till daybreak, “*until you bless me!*”, will you now ask, plead, cry out to God to speak *specifically to you* - What is most true of me God?! Who am I? What is my name? Is my heart desperately wicked or is my heart good?
8. If you have never trusted Christ, do you realize His passion to give to you a new and deeply good heart right now in this very moment? If this is you, we cannot encourage you enough to ask questions and talk with your leader or someone else in your group about this.
9. “You have been given a new identity and a new nature, *defined by Christ’s light*. What might it mean for you to fan *that* flame?” In response, what is one thing that you need to *do* this week?

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Chapter 9: The Invisible Battle

1. In the opening paragraphs of this chapter Michael describes a specific time of entering through this invisible door of evil into his sexual addiction. Can you relate/recall walking through this door?
2. What do you believe/not believe in regard to Satan and demons being living, breathing entities?
3. If you are completely honest, do you believe that you will ever change? If so, why? If not, why not?
4. What is your earliest memory of your sexuality becoming a target of the evil one? How old were you? Where were you - in a car, a bedroom, a bathroom, in the middle of the woods? For most of us this memory takes place when we were very young. It shouldn't come as a surprise then that Satan has been on the prowl to destroy our sexuality for our entire lives.
5. Michael writes, "When your identity as a man is at stake, porn, power, or possessions will hold an irresistible appeal." Then he asks, "What tempts you...who are you really?...what defines you?" Take a few moments to reflect on these questions.
6. Calvin Miller writes, "He (the Enemy) rarely comes to us asking us to sign a contract for our souls. He is rather the god of the side deals, who never buys souls all at once. He purchases us on the installment plan." Do you identify with this? If so, take some time to write out in bullet-point style the slow progression of "installments" that you have made in regard to porn from the beginning until now.
7. Read through the "common" lies listed at the bottom of page 117. Which of these have you befriended (most of us have more than one)? Are there any you would add for yourself? Again ask God to reveal to you the lies you've believed. Will you ask Jesus again *what is true of my heart*?
8. Now take some time to pray through the prayer on pages 119-121?

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Chapter 10: Your Brain on Porn

1. As Michael describes the brain chemistry behind “needing porn”, does this feel liberating to you? Confining? Like an excuse? When he writes, “contrary to conventional wisdom, our brains are highly changeable,” how does this make you feel?
2. Porn overstimulates your brain in four unique ways in a “potentially never-ending cycle”. Again C.S. Lewis describes of the wiles of evil in *The Screwtape Letters*, “An ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure is the formula.” Can you relate to this? What rises up in you as you read these words?
3. Can you relate to this “path of least resistance”, that of looking at porn *even when you don’t want to*?
4. Michael writes, “rebooting your brain may be the most difficult thing you’ve ever done.” Does this leave you feeling deflated or inspired? Will you have the courage to engage this process?
5. In preparation to reboot your brain, what is your objective? *Who is it that you really want to become* and how does porn keep you from becoming this man? Write this down.
6. Have you thought of a friend who will walk with you through this? Have you asked them? Have you set a start date and bought or made a calendar to track your progress?
7. What are some ideas you have as to how specifically over the next 90 days you can “think about such things that are excellent or praiseworthy”? Movies to watch, music to listen to, books to read that are good for your heart and mind? Remember porn has provided counterfeit “self-care”. How can you care for yourself in ways that are truly excellent or praiseworthy?
8. What are some of the passions that you know reside within that you have ignored in lieu of porn. What would it take to reengage one or two of these?
9. Do you exercise? If not, start. Start small. Plan for some light aerobic exercise 10-15 minutes a day, 4-5 days a week ideally outside and then stick to the goal. The late Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “Self-respect is the root of discipline: the sense of dignity grows with the ability to say no to oneself.”

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Chapter 11: Less Is More

1. Can you relate to the type of morning that Michael describes in the opening pages of this chapter? Does it make sense that his chaotic morning then translated to becoming “preoccupied with when and how I could act out again sexually”? How do you relate to this in *your* life?
2. In an age of near constant distraction - a “hyper-connected world” - computers, iPhones, iPads, etc., being still, practicing solitude and silence is SUCH a discipline. “We have become, as Kierkegaard said, tranquilized by the trivial.” Sit for a moment, close your eyes and imagine how the “idea” of being alone and silent feels to you. Restful? Terrifying?
3. Re-read the quote from Henri Nouwen, p. 141. “To live a spiritual life we must first find the courage to enter into the desert of our loneliness and to change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden of solitude. The movement from loneliness to solitude, however, is the beginning of any spiritual life because it is the movement from the restless senses to the restful spirit, from the outward-reaching cravings to the inward-reaching search, from the fearful clinging to the fearless play.” Take a few moments and respond. What do you relate to? What does this stir within your heart?
4. What is your initial response to the words “spiritual disciplines”? Why? Has it always been this way?
5. We challenge you to this: Carve out 20 minutes a day for one week beginning tomorrow. Re-read the 1st paragraph on page 144 of the book. As you sit by yourself in silence ask yourself the question, “as I listen to my soul, what is it saying to me”? Practice centering prayer according to the simple guidelines on p. 148-149.
6. “We love because he first loved us” - 1 John 4:19. What do you imagine it might be like to sit in the presence of God with no other goal except to be delighted in?

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Chapter 12: The Soul Care Highway

1. Michael writes, “Knowing that you have a highway in your heart should be very comforting. You may get disoriented and lose your way, but you can always return to the highway. It’s right there in your heart.” In light of chapter 8, do you now believe that this is true? If not, that’s ok but what is it that stands in your way?
2. Like Connor blamed his wife for his addiction to porn, who/what do you blame? In identifying your brokenness stop now and take a few moments to make a list of the: wounds you carry, the weaknesses you conceal or compensate for, the ways spiritual warfare plays into the lies you believe, and the ways wickedness (the sinful self-reliance to preserve and protect yourself) plays out.
3. Go back to question #5 of chapter 2. Which broken promises of porn do you relate to?
4. In question #3 of chapter 7 you made a list of your triggers. Revisit these. What does it mean practically speaking for you to “stalk them and learn their positions so you can shut them down”? When you have cravings, what would it look like for you to stop whatever you are doing whether at work or play and ask what the longing beneath the urge is all about? Will you take the time to stop and “surf” your urges?
5. Michael writes, “Carrying tension begins by recognizing that a force is pulling against you, toward the path of least resistance. This force seeks the easiest resolution for the least amount of effort. It is a force pulling for the *diminishment of your soul*...Carrying tension always involves necessary suffering and embracing our pain, not because we are masochistic, but because the pain leads to well-being and growth of our souls.” Do you know any men who carry this tension well? Who are they? How do you or would you talk about them? Who do you *most deeply* want to become?
6. Take several minutes to write down the answer in each of the following categories to the first question - *What does my soul really need right now?* - *Physically? Relationally? Emotionally? Spiritually?* Now answer the second question in each of these 4 categories - *How can I begin to meet those needs in a legitimate, healthy way?*
7. As you journey down this path of soul transformation be aware of your heart growing in faith, hope, and love. As you feel, experience, and know this movement within take the time to sit and write about your experiences in your journal. Then share your experiences with those who love you - ask where they see movement - have a good meal or dessert or just a cup of coffee...it doesn’t really matter but you must learn to *celebrate* a heart that is *becoming transformed*.

Surfing for God Discussion Questions

Chapter 13: Freedom to Live

1. What are the ways that you typically try to impress, manipulate, or attempt in your own unique way to earn love? Can you think of one time/experience where this compulsion to be someone that you are not subsided where you experienced God's free and abundant love? What was this like?
2. In what areas of your life are you aware now of God wanting to free your heart *toward*?
3. Michael writes, "In the very place of sin and shame and failure, the very places where we need to seek God's help and healing, He promises to make us oaks of righteousness. That secret, hidden place of your greatest struggle, failure, or shame? That's exactly where God wants to meet you." What comes up within you as you read this? Cynicism? Hope? Why?
4. Michael writes, "Deep transformation is possible; in fact, it is your birthright, but no quick fix is available." Take a moment now to read Matthew 13:44. Michael writes, "Doing whatever it takes is not an act of force but an act of humility. For every man battling lust and porn, doing whatever it takes involves a step where you must trust God and trust others." What does it mean for you right now to "sell everything to buy the treasure".
5. Remember that transformation is a process. We encourage you to take a moment now to simply pray, "Father, give me patience and kindness toward myself as I trust you that you are in the process of transforming my heart. Help me to be strong as I face the trials of this change and participate with you in the work that you are doing within me. Give me the confidence that you who began a good work in me have *promised* that you will carry this work on to completion until the day that I meet Jesus face to face. Amen."

Surfing for God Discussion Questions

Chapter 14: Going Under the Knife

1. As Michael tells the story of his father giving up alcohol, do you believe that you have it within you to decide to “grow up” and “learn to live as God’s free and chosen (man)”?
2. Michael writes, “Ultimately, we each decide whether we will grow up. As we grow up, we are transformed from brokenness to wholeness, emptiness to fullness, and self-absorption to other-centeredness. The result is that we can more freely give.” Hopefully, this is empowering to you. The question then becomes, “will you bear the weight of redemptive suffering”? Will you be a man and fight for far more than your mediocre self-satisfaction? Who do you want to become? What do you want to be said of you when you lie flat on your back and your days have come to an end?
3. Can you relate to having *cop accountability*? How about *coach accountability*? Have you ever experienced *cardiologist accountability*? Do you have this now? If so - fantastic! If not, can you think of a man who could provide this for you? Will you have the courage to ask for this?
4. “Take a moment right now and ask yourself what you rely on to establish your identity. In light of what God’s Word says about circumcision of the heart, what would it mean for you to surrender whatever defines you in order to let God define you?”
5. This week as you take 20 minutes a day for contemplative prayer will you pray these words at the beginning, “Jesus, what do You want to say to me?” Then stop and listen.
6. Michael writes, “To enter into this deeper, fuller life, however, we must learn to live without something. Like my father who needed to grow up and learn to live without alcohol. Like the Israelites who needed to grow up and learn to live freely without idols.” What must you learn to live without - what must you let go of? In doing so, what legitimate need are you asking God to provide for? Will you ask Him?
7. Will you take the time necessary to pray through the prayer for circumcising your heart at the end of the chapter?

Surfing for God Discussion Questions

Conclusion: Becoming the Hero That You Are

"A hero is someone who has given his life to something bigger than himself." - Joseph Campbell.

1. One of the biggest obstacles to growth is an unwillingness to be honest about or "ok with" where you are at. So let's begin by answering the bullet-point questions on page 193 listed again here for your convenience.

Where are *you* in:

- 1) understanding the root issues as to why you struggle with porn?
 - 2) recognizing the empty promises porn has made to you and knowing your God-given desires for which porn is a substitute?
 - 3) owning your personal brokenness and resisting shame's grip on your soul?
 - 4) uncovering the lies you believe and living out of your good heart?
 - 5) learning how to care for your own soul?
2. *What do you do with the story of Victor?!* This, my friends is the story of the gospel - the gospel of restoration. What does Victor's story do deep within your spirit?
 3. We live in a culture where we can get virtually whatever we want whenever we want it, *especially* when it comes to an endless supply of internet porn. But it makes us hollow men without form and substance. And God will not "kill the lizard" against your will. Does He have your permission? Take some time and pray with one another. As you are led from your heart, give God permission by speaking it out loud in the presence of your brothers in Christ.
 4. What does it look like for you as an act of faith in what is most deeply true of your heart mean for you to *choose life*?
 5. Will you do so? These are desperate days...your masculine heart, nobility & strength are so *desperately needed*.

God loves you beyond your wildest imagination. He always has been and continues to be in hot pursuit of your soul. So it is imperative for you now to take the necessary time to answer the same final, simple question that we began with on day one.

Where are *you* now?