

PORNFREE RADIO

011 Technology and Porn with Luke Gilkerson of Covenant Eyes

Matt: Pornfree Radio Episode 11. Welcome to Pornfree Radio. I'm Matt Dobschuetz. Pornfree Radio is *the* podcast aimed at creating connections with people who want to live free from porn addiction. This weekly podcast provides the tools and strategies to live 100% porn free. Today we're talking about technology and porn with Luke Gilkerson from Covenant Eyes. Luke's the internet community manager of Covenant Eyes, which includes being the general editor and primary author of the Covenant Eyes blog. He might be the most prolific blogger on the subject of porn and recovery on the internet.

Luke: (Laughs.)

Matt: I was trying to see how many, I was trying to count how many blog posts he did and there was 45 pages of results and I got tired of trying to count. So I don't know how many. He might know.

Luke: I think I'm over 1500 at this point. I'm not sure.

Matt: I was going to say over a thousand because I saw different weeks where you were posting two or three blog posts a week and I was reading your LinkedIn comment about you and your coworker described you like a woodpecker, just in the zone hammering out blog posts, so um...

Luke: (Laughs.)

Matt: Yeah, I thought that was cool. So anyway, the most prolific blogger on the subject of porn, I'm just going to call you that, on the Internet. He's the author of several ebooks, including the recently updated [Your Brain on Porn](#). And then in his free time he and his wife Tricia run a blog called [IntoxicatedonLife.com](#), which has an awesome design and a ton of cool things on it. Family related. Definitely excited to have Luke here. Luke, welcome to Pornfree Radio.

Luke: Thank you, Matt, for having me on. I appreciate it.

Matt: Hey, well, Luke, I just wanted to start. I have been working on porn recovery myself for about 13 years. At some point sort of became the go-to person to go to at church or in life when people had problems. But I've noticed in the last few years guys will start the conversation a lot of times, or women actually, too, coming. They always start the conversation with me like this: Do you know of some software or a filter I can use for this operating system or this mobile phone or for... you know... all sorts of devices or technology related things. It seems more and more that people are identifying their struggle with porn as like a technology problem and so I was wondering, is this a technology problem? If not, then what is it?

Luke: It is a technology problem; it is, but far more than that. So yes, do you have a relationship with technology that's connected to your relationship with porn? Yes, you do. But, it is more than that. It is a relational problem. It is a spiritual problem. And it's hard... I really like to call porn a worship disorder. It's really more about where our hearts, what our hearts are fascinated with, what our hearts are centering our identities around. So, is it mediated around technology? Absolutely, it is. At least for most people it is, unless you're you know, in the 1970's looking at magazines and stuff like that. But yeah, you are going to be most immediate threat through the internet. But ultimately, it's gotta come back to the heart.

Matt: It seems like it's a heart thing that they're going for but they get confused with the medium or they know it's coming through the medium. I guess what I was trying to think about is how do you respond to that kind of question about filtering? How do you get them to talk about some of the heart stuff?

Luke: Well, I congratulate them for thinking about the technology. That's a good place to start, especially if people have been caught up in this stuff for years, they don't actually see the spiritual or the relational dynamics yet. So, um, they're seeing the medium, they're seeing where the porn is coming from and they're wanting to make a fast break from it, put up a big wall. Put a big partition between them and the porn and that's good. That's a great step to do. So figure that out. So that as you now got some distance from the pornography, your heads a little clearer you can actually start thinking about some of the relational some of the spiritual dynamics that are going on. That's really key. So at first I congratulate them, I say good that you want to do that. I'll help you do that. Then

second would be, now that you've done that now we can actually get to work on the real stuff.

Matt: Right.

Luke: 'Cause what you just did was the easiest step in the whole thing. It's technology, as long as it works and as long as you don't create any back doors for yourself with the technology, then yeah, it will serve you well. But, but, that's the easy step. Now we can get to the real work.

Matt: What's the real work? What's next? Is it relationship? Is it involving other people? How do other people fit into it?

Luke: Other people definitely fit into the process all along the way. At every stage of this. Obviously, we use the buzzword of accountability a lot. And it's a common word thrown around recovery circles; it's certainly thrown around in our business because we have accountability software.

Accountability as I understand it is just a riff on all the one another's of the New Testament. So it's love one another, support one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, confess your sins to one another... All those one anothers are a picture of what the Body of Christ is meant to look like. It's a picture of what the church is meant to look like. It's a picture of how we're to relate to one another in the context of Christian friendships and so it is where we go to, to get information about how we're meant to relate to each other.

Not just because of porn, but because it's how we're meant to relate to each other as human beings. It's how we're meant to relate to each other as fellow Christians. So some people, unfortunately, treat accountability as a last resort. It's like this is the thing, this is my last ditch effort, this is what people with real serious problems do is they get accountability. And while that is statistically true, people tend to seek out accountability in the midst of feeling like there's some serious problem in their life, it is not... accountability is not meant to be a last resort. It is meant to be a lifestyle.

Matt: Right.

Luke: A lifestyle that is encouraged, time and time and time again throughout the New Testament. So it is not a last resort. It's a lifestyle. People also treat it like it's a crutch that they should be able to live without. Like you think of a crutch, I broke my leg and need a crutch. I understand that

eventually my leg will heal and I won't need the crutch anymore. That's the hope. That's the goal. If I need the crutch for the rest of my life, then something's gone wrong. So people treat accountability like the crutch. It's the thing I'm going to graduate from, to get to the real freedom, which looks like no accountability but I'm still free.

Matt: Right. Complete independence or something like that.

Luke: Complete independence, right. And I think it's the exact opposite.

Matt: Yeah.

Luke: It's the exact opposite. We are never truly free until we are free to be in vulnerable, true, face to face relationships with other people.

Matt: Right.

Luke: Anyone who is living as an island or thinks that that's the ideal, is that I shouldn't need people... One doesn't recognize the way you're created as a human being. We're created in as human beings to be together. So we're not doing justice to who we are as human beings. And two, we're not doing justice to the seriousness and the utter depth of our sinfulness.

Matt: Yeah.

Luke: We are underestimating just how self deceiving sin is. That is one of the greatest benefits of accountability is a second set of eyes on what we are so easy to deceive ourselves in. And when you have those sets of eyes looking in on your life, you are better for it. The book of Hebrews says this over and over again. In multiple places. Hebrews 10 talks about meeting together, not in a collecting meeting together but encouraging one another and spurring one another on to do good deeds. Hebrews 3:13 is one of my favorites. Where it says that we should encourage one another daily as long as it's called today so that we will not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. That there's actually something about sin that hardens and deceives us. And there is something redemptive that God places in the life of a person to actually mitigate against that self deception.

Matt: Yeah.

Luke: And it's called relationship. It's called converse... this encouraging, accountability, conversational relationship that is meant to... It's actually

a means of grace God gives to guard against the self deceiving nature of sin which is why we can never step away from accountability in our lives and expect that we are going to be spiritually fit and ok. We are meant to be in that kind of, by our nature, by our creational, the way we are created we are meant to be in community, we are redeemed within community. This is not a last ditch effort, this is not a last resort, this is not a crutch, this is the way it's meant to be.

Matt: Yeah. I think that's just powerful. If you think about when someone starts the conversation, talking about technology. On some level, there's a relational issue there. They're getting isolated in their computer or in their technology and they're kind of getting sucked in and it's powerful. I love how you say you congratulate them for coming to you. I think that's great because there's this sense of they're realizing there's something more they need. So following up with this idea of accountability, this relational thing, I think that's also really powerful.

I love to say to people that accountability isn't passive. You know I've heard people complain that their accountability partner or whoever they've told about their struggle didn't ask the right question or somehow didn't, wasn't calling enough. And I always put it back on that person saying this is a need that you have and you need to kind of take the steps to reach out. You need to tell on yourself. You need to be the one who's constantly connecting. Because the moment that you start pulling away waiting for the other person to come after you, you get back into that island mentality that you're talking about. And the next thing you know, you're right back in to the swirl of porn or just isolation in general. And you're maybe even nursing the idea that you can kind of do it alone.

Luke: Right. I think it's endemic of our society and culture in general where we have this, I think sociologists call it Online Disinhibition Effect, which is a really fancy way of saying that when we get online we lose our inhibitions. We lose the social constraints that make us behave like good boys and girls and we feel like we can do whatever we want, say whatever we want, be whoever we want. We get into that world of these online worlds, whether it's looking at porn, whether it's calling people names online, whether it's in our communications, flirting with other people, whatever it is. We get into those worlds where we feel less inhibited to do and say the things we want. It's really, what brings it on though, is the illusion of secrecy.

Matt: Yeah.

Luke: We think that we're really secretive. In reality, we're not. Nearly everything we can do online is being tracked by somebody somewhere. So in reality, everything we do online leaves some kind of digital footprint. And what we do with the notion of Internet accountability is that we say, we put the onus back on the person who wants the freedom and we tell that person, look. We give them the tools anyway for the person to say I know that when I go online I'm not really alone.

One, God sees everything I do anyway. Two, everything I do online impacts my life offline anyway, it's not just that I can go here and do what I want and then my life is fine regardless. So I recognize that this is an illusion. I recognize that secrecy is an illusion. So now accountability software, what it does is it rips people out of that illusion, constantly. So if they've got it on their smartphone or their tablet, or they've got it on their laptop or wherever they have the software if they have it on all their devices, there's that constant reminder there. And it's not just that someone's watching you or they're going to catch you. It's not about catching anybody. You don't install spyware for yourself thinking that someone's spying on you.

You're letting them in. You're allowing them to come in. You are intentionally giving people a window into your life. That window not only opens up opportunities for them to converse with you, but it's a constant reminder to you that you are not living in secrecy. You are choosing not to live in secrecy. It's a daily reminder of that. That every moment I get online, this matters. Yes, even this little click, this little link, this picture, this image, this rabbit trail I can go down. Where I started it looks ok but now I'm down into some gray stuff, now I'm definitely into porn. That trail that people go down so often that you can catch yourself early in the process and saying, No I'm not going to do that. Because I know that, it's not just that I'm being watched. It's I'm going to do that because I know this really matters in the real world. This affects my real world relationships. It's not just a private online thing.

Matt: Yeah, definitely. You're online life effects your offline life. And there's an illusion sometimes that there's no consequences. There's always the illusion that there's no consequences. And that can be very powerful. I wanted to ask you something. We started talking about your prolific blogging and I think it's really interesting your company, Covenant Eyes, is a technology company or software company, that's what your business is selling, but there's this holistic philosophy that you guys have. Tell me a little bit about that. How does a tech company make such a large investment in content and education?

Luke: Well, the first reason, I'd say, is really important. It needs to be said about the technology we have. Because the cornerstone of our products is our accountability service, our accountability software, which say unlike a filtering software, but by the way we do have a filter too, we do have filtering, but unlike filtering software, accountability software has no value at all apart from the relationships that are centered around the accountability. If I install the software on my machine and I never choose an accountability partner, it will just be running there monitoring with no one to pick up reports and look at the stuff. That is worthless. That is worthless information. It's just sending information one way into our servers where it's just being stored and then dumped after 30 days. You know, that's all it's doing. That is a worthless service. So apart from the relationships that people have, accountability software doesn't have much value.

So one of the reasons why we invest so much in the education is because we feel the only way for people to have a quality internet experience around the software is if they have a quality relational experience with the people who are receiving those reports. So if that is the parent receiving that report for their child, we want to have education for the parent, How do I talk to my child about porn? How do I talk to my child about internet dangers? How do I talk to my child about these things? How do I talk to my child about the weird things I see on their report, whatever that is?

If it's a peer to peer accountability relationship, we want to have information in there, How do I have these conversations about online temptations that are really meaningful that actually get to the heart of the problem. That aren't just centered on just sort of a wimpy accountability where we just sort of pass along information where we say, Well, you did it again. Well, we just pat you on the back, say a prayer and go home. And we come back again to see the same thing on the report the next week.

Matt: Yeah, I used to call this complicit accountability or where it's worse when you have two partners together they're both messing up and they're both sort of trying to scold and pat each other on the back and neither of them are getting anywhere.

Luke: Yeah. It's sort of a commiserating accountability. It has its value in one sense you feel you're not alone. But the problem is it can easily turn into a cesspool of discouragement because now I don't feel alone, but now I feel like I've got my buddy, he looks at porn and I look at porn too, but

now we're both lost.

Matt: I used to go to a meeting where I felt worse leaving than when I got there. Because the stories were so bad. Especially the leader couldn't stay sober. And so it was just like, oh my gosh this is horrible.

Luke: It is terrible. It is. I think there's a couple elements to helpful accountability that need to be remembered. I'll take my cue from the book of Proverbs on this because there's some really great stuff in there about how to have these kind of relationships. Two key elements are real friendship and wisdom. You need to have both to have a quality accountability relationship.

So real friendship that's like Proverbs 17:17 a friend is a friend at all times and a brother is born of adversity. Right? You have to have that sense of camaraderie, that sense that this is a true friend, a brother, someone who's actually going to be with me through thick and thin, when the adversity comes, when the temptation comes they're not going to shrug their shoulders and leave me high and dry. They're going to be with me through the thick of it. Real friendship, real connection.

The second one is wisdom. One of my favorite proverbs speaks to this. And that is Proverbs 20:5 which says the purpose in a man's heart is like deep water but a man of understanding will draw it out. So if I can unpack that. The purpose of a man's heart is deep water. We cannot see to the bottom of our own hearts. We cannot look to the bottom of our hearts and understand all the reasons why we do the things we do. We don't know why at times why porn seems so repulsive and the next day so enticing to the point where we have to give in or we feel we have to give in. We don't understand all the motives that move us to want these sexual online experiences. But then he follows it up with a man of understanding will draw it out. It's talking about a man of understanding is a man of wisdom, is able to go to the bottom of someone else's heart and draw up the things that are really going on, the real motivations.

I think accountability needs both of those elements. You need a genuine connection with someone, a genuine friendship, a genuine sense of togetherness and brotherhood combined with a sense of wisdom that this person can actually get to the root of me. They can actually help me see what I can't see or I'm unwilling to see about myself. When you can find someone who can meet those two criteria, then you have the makings of a great accountability relationship. And it's incredible when you can find that kind of thing.

So what I tell guys, or gals about this is, what I would tell them to do is, start with what you have. Maybe there's a person in your life who you would describe as a true, spiritual, brother, friend, sister, someone who can really give you that sense of solidarity and connection to. Especially someone who identifies with your faith as well. Let's say you already have that. Now get together and ramp up your relationship in the wisdom department. Now, get to the, read good books together about how to get to the heart. Get good curriculum about it. Sit under good teaching about it and partner together to learn about that and become experts in one another's hearts. And figure that out. And say, this is the kind of relationship we want and we're going to ramp up the wisdom.

Or maybe you have someone in your life on the other end, someone you already know is really wise, maybe an older person at your church, an elder, maybe your pastor, maybe a counselor, maybe whatever. Someone who you already know has got the wisdom department cornered. And they can get together with you without very much conversation at all can get to the core of you. If they already have that, then ramp up the friendship department with that person. You know, go over to their house for dinner. Get to know their families. Hang out together. Do things together that help to build that solidarity and that sense of friendship. So start with what you have and then build from there. And if you don't have anybody in your life who's like either of those things, then it just shows how isolated you really are and it's time to get into community where you can do that.

Matt: I totally think that's true. And doing that skill is not a onetime thing. You move to a different town because of work... Guess what? You need to start finding a community where you can meet other people where you can start building some of those friendships and those look for those deep heart type guys and girls who can really get in there. I think that's so powerful. And that's back to the crutch idea. That's one thing we think is like we do pretty well, how many guys had a powerful experience with a good accountability partner in college and then they leave college and then all of a sudden they're on their own again. So it's a lifestyle of creating these relationships. Sometimes friendships come and go. You have a guy move away you can't connect as meaningful. People have kids. People... life gets in the way and you have to figure out who's new who's the person you're going to connect with and where are you going to get that support from. I think that's a powerful way to end here.

Just like going from talking about this initial conversation talking about technology to this idea about friendship and wisdom in this deeper

relationship is what really breaks through. Luke, I just love what you're saying, I love the verses. I'm going to have this all in our show notes at pornfreeradio.com/11. I'll have links to [Covenant Eyes](#) of course, the blogs, and some of my favorite blog posts by Luke. I'll also have a link to the free ebook, Your Brain on Porn, which you guys recently revised a little bit, is that right?

Luke: We did.

Matt: Ok, cool, so I'll have a link to that. You can get that at pornfreeradio.com/brain and that's definitely a cool resource and it kind of talks a lot about... it's five proven ways porn warps your brain and five biblical principles on how to renew your brain. It's a really great resource and totally worth picking up. So I just really appreciate you being here, Luke, and all the work that you're doing, all the writing that you're doing. Keep up the awesome blog posts and the ebooks and I just want to thank you for all your work.

Luke: Yes, I really appreciate the encouragement on that. Thank you for having me on the show, Matt. I appreciate it.

Matt: Yeah, definitely. All right, we'll see you next week on Pornfree Radio.