

Carl Thomas. Carl Thomas. Carl Thomas.

Have you heard that name before?

Have you heard of Live Free Ministries?

How about XXXchurch.com?

Carl Thomas is three warriors rolled into one.

Carl is an ordained pastor and certified neuro coach, but he is also the founder of Live Free Ministries which has a ministry project called XXXchurch which has taken on the herculean task of battling porn addiction and creating healthy conversations around the topics of porn, masturbation, and sexual integrity.

Carl began leading Small Groups Online (an online support group program) for seven years before transitioning into and creating Living Free Ministries which also launched Live Free Wives and later acquired XXXchurch.com.

I began each paragraph with his name because it is important that you remember who he is because if you remember his name, you can give it to someone you know that struggles with porn addiction and will have the opportunity to get help due to Carl Thomas and his ministry.

Let us begin our discipleship.

Thanks for doing this interview, and i must say it really is more a conversation because of the ministry that you have and the battle you and your team are involved with, and zi want to say thanks again for being brave and leading the way through a torrent, and endless downpour of pornography which has affected so many people and really is not addressed as openly as it should be, but thankfully your ministry is stepping into people's lives so they can kick their addiction out.

TS: I am going to start with that previous word: "Addiction" some people say that porn is not a problem, or it is normal, or everybody looks at it and that it does no harm. What do say to someone that says there is no such thing as porn addiction?

CT: I get this question an awful lot. I'm going to tell you the same thing that I tell everybody else. I don't get hung up on terminologies regarding addiction because it's a very highly debated term, especially when it comes to porn and sex - primarily because when we get into these conversations, we are talking clinical. Is it clinically or scientifically proven to be an addiction? There's kind of a litmus test that must be passed to be considered "addictive."

There's been many, many studies over the years that claim porn is not addictive, and there has been some recently that claim the opposite. My answer to all that is I don't really care if it's clinically addictive or not.

It can be called a habit, a compulsive behavior, or an addiction; call it whatever the heck you want to call it. At the end of the day if you have some behavior (in this case, porn) and you keep going back to it, and you can't seem to stop, and it's creating a problem in your life, that is really all that matters.

Who cares what some scientists or Harvard professor says?

If it's wrecking your life or if you just can't stop, that is a problem.

So, if porn is still something you just can't seem to put down or stop then it has control over you and it's something you need to look into getting help for. So again, I don't care about the terms.

If you want to say, "Well, I don't think it's a problem for me" then I'm not going to convince you otherwise... but ask yourself these questions:

- 1) Hey, can I put this down?
- 2) Can I stop when I want?
- 3) Is this creating potential issues in my life? My relationships? My job? or whatever.

The answers to these questions are going to tell you everything you need to know about what porn has done to you.

TS: America is a society that has an addictive behavior. We are addicted to things that do not add much value to our lives but give us pleasure, or release. Most forms of addiction that are talked about are alcoholism, drugs and it seems recently social media/technology addiction, but pornography goes undetected, but not to the people it has infected and has changed the way they interact with people that are closest to them. Porn is a destructive, behavior modifying addiction, so with your experience and training as a Neuro Health Coach can you explain how pornography alters the neurology of the mind and causes the addiction?

CT: We do things (as human beings) all the time that we know are not good for us, right? And we still do them. And why are we doing them? Because it feels good.

That is a really kind of layperson term of way of talking about something we call vagal tone, fight or flight thinking vs. critical thinking.

Ideally we should be evaluating the outcomes of our choices. We should be contemplating how what we do impacts our goals and our values. But most people just go with what their brain is saying to do in the moment because it is going to be the choice that delivers the best "feeling."

Repeated porn use hijacks your brain's rewards system and reinforces the tendency to go with what feels good vs what actually is good.

TS: We all know about warnings. We are taught from an early age (usually) from our parents that something is bad for us, but once we hit the adult stage of our lives, we are free to choose to do what we want regardless of the outcome. It is the "if it feels good do it" slogan that a lot of adults live by, but we still get warnings. The tobacco industry has been heavily regulated, and pretty much bullied into taxed submission and must place clearly identifiable risks of smoking on each pack of cigarettes, do you see that as a possibility with pornography? Will there be a warning that on each site, DVD, or whatever is being used to carry pornography into people's lives that it does pose a risk?

CT: I am not sure. I guess it is a possibility. No one is really using DVD's these days, but yes, I mean you already see this in the porn industry a little bit. I am not going to say a lot, but I have seen warnings on occasion that if porn is an issue or whatever to go get help.

However, honestly, no - I do not really think that warning labels are going to change anything in the grand scheme of things. Most people know that porn is not good or healthy, and the ones that do not are just in a bit of denial and do not want to admit it. And for those people all labels in the world are not going to convince them otherwise.

TS: These have been some long questions, but I will lighten up a bit soon, so hang in there Carl! With your ministry and the ability, it has in reaching out to help people struggling with the unspoken addiction of porn, what is the trend as relates to porn being made has that increased? And what about the victims trying to break free from their addiction, is it getting better or worse?

CT: We do not really focus on the "porn industry" or porn production side of things. But, look at the numbers. The numbers say, yeah, not much is changing- if anything, it is getting worse.

So clearly something else is missing here other than the message that porn is "bad." I don't have specific stats in front of me here but I would say in terms of "is more porn being made?" Yes and no.

There is the "professional" more organized side of the porn industry, and I believe we are seeing a decline because they are losing revenue.

They can't really compete with the amateur sites and everything else that is going on online.

Traditional porn production houses are either changing their business model to try to do more stuff online, or they are going out of business.

You are not seeing the big budget porn films like you did back in the 80s.

That being said, in terms of a genre, the production is higher, and it keeps growing because of the entrance of the amateur scene.

Anybody with a cam can be a porn star if they want, and there's money to be had and some people are making a lot of it and of course, there's attention to be had.

So, we are going to keep seeing that grow and grow and grow as online access continues.

But, in terms of consumption?

Consumption continues to grow. Addiction rates continue to grow. We are not seeing a reduction there, and a lot of that again has to do with access. As access increases, more people are getting exposed to it.

TS: Women are also trapped in the I will call it porn-addiction-cycle. They are dealing with a partner that has the addiction and are in denial, so from their aspect it is difficult to address the issue when someone is in denial, but it is affecting the relationship in a very profound manner, and let's be

honest, women

are victimized by the industry as performers and their own personal relationships because of the neurologic change it creates. What options do women have? Is there something called accountability software?

CT: Yeah, porn obviously impacts men, spouses, and children. It impacts everyone. But let's not forget about the women who struggle with porn themselves.

We like to forget about them sometimes or act like they are not that affected by it, but the number of women who struggle continues to grow year by year. There are an awful lot of women out there that deal with porn or let's just say, unwanted sexual behavior. So women are impacted by porn both as a user and of course obviously as the spouse of a user.

In terms of the resources we offer - we are more focused on men in terms of our resources, just because they make up the larger percent of the population who deal with this stuff. Or put it this way, the larger percent of the population who are willing to admit they have an issue.

I am sure the number of women struggling is much larger than we think, but it all comes down to are they willing to self-identify or not.

So we obviously have a bunch of stuff for men, and for spouses with Live Free Wives which is an online community just for women in a relationship with men who are either dealing with porn or sex addiction or infidelity issues.

Live Free Wives is a free community where they can sign up and join at livefreewives.org. We have free content and offer peer-to-peer support. It's great. I mean, we continue to see more and more women join that community. It's only been around for six months, and it's already about half the size of the male community we run.

We also offer online small groups for men (think more like online support group) that offer increased accountability, encouragement, that sort of thing.

We run these groups also for women who struggle with porn, and we run these groups for spouses.

Obviously, the focus with spouses is a little different. It's not. "Hey, you need accountability and encouragement in your porn struggle!" It's more "Hey, you need someone to talk to on your path to healing." You might need some accountability in terms of what you are doing to find healing, but obviously the focus is different.

For the women who struggle with porn, we do have online small groups but that is all we offer currently for them. But, we are always in the works trying to find new things that we can do to help women, spouses, and of course men.

As far as the accountability software goes, X3watch is not our resource. It is a resource of Fireproof Ministries who used to "own" XXXchurch. We still recommend it for contractual reasons but it's not our resource nor do we offer accountability/filtering software.

TS: I snuck in a couple of extra questions in those paragraphs, so now let's have a little bit of fun and see what this Jersey Boy likes to do when he is not ministering. So, what is this I hear about you being infatuated with your Jeep? And you are A Philadelphia sports teams' fan? That is all good, but what about food? Come on, what is the secret indulgence?

CT: Yeah man, I love my Jeep Wrangler. I can't believe I waited till I was in my 40s to buy one, but something about having the doors off and the top down is just awesome. My wife jokes that my Jeep is my girlfriend. I don't know about that - I wouldn't call it my girlfriend, but I would say that my Jeep is a bit of a passion.

My kids joke around and say they wonder if I love my Jeep more than them. I say it depends on the day. Of course, that is all a joke, but we do kid around about Dad's infatuation with his Jeep.

Philly sports teams are definitely a passion of mine. Although I do have my favorites. I mean I am more of a football and basketball guy, although the Sixers completely crapped the bed in the playoffs.

So, I am not happy with them right now.

My son, quite frankly, makes my sports fandom look like nothing. I mean, he is diehard. At 13 he knows more about professional sports than a lot of guys my age. He is all into it because he is following all the trade rumors and tracks the stats on all the players he loves.

As far as secret indulgence in terms of food? Oh man, I try not to indulge. I'm into fitness. I try to eat right, but yeah, obviously I have certain things I really like that I'm not supposed to have.

I love sweets sometimes, but I would not call myself a sweet guy. I'm more of a Savory guy. So, you know, wings...a good cheese steak. Those types of things are the things that I really, really enjoy.

I mean, if you are from the Philadelphia area, nothing like a Philly cheese steak. It's absolutely terrible for you, but it tastes so good.

I Don't eat them that often, nor do I eat the wings that often, but when I do, it is nice so, yeah, that is what I would say is my Go-To in terms of my preferred comfort food.

TS: One more; Would you rather be invisible, or able to read minds?

CT: Ok, I'm going to say neither because both could get me in a lot of trouble I think or put me in a position where I have a significant advantage over somebody else.

But if I had to pick one, I would go with reading minds. How incredible would it be to know what a person is thinking?

Plus, I could make a killing at the poker table, so that would be pretty awesome.

TS: A passion to help people find freedom from their addiction, while enabling them with peace and the reward of discovering their purpose, that is Carl Thomas.