

138. What's Possible with Josh



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sara Brewer

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You are listening to the *Overcome Pornography for Good* podcast episode 138, What's Possible with Josh.

Welcome to the *Overcome Pornography For Good* podcast where we take a research-based, trauma informed and results focused approach to quitting porn. This approach has been revolutionary and changed thousands and thousands of lives. I'm your host, Sara Brewer.

Hey, you guys, welcome to today's episode. We have our final What's Possible episode of the year. I don't think we'll do any more this year. I recorded a bunch, and this is the last one that we've got. We'll see, maybe I'll reach out and see who else has great stories that we want to bring on the podcast.

I would be interested to hear your perspectives on this. Do we want more? Let me know. You can let me know via Instagram, you can let me know via email support@sarabrewer.com. Let me know.

Before we hop in I just want to let you know we have that ecclesiastical leader training that is live. So it's \$25 for any leader. It can be youth leaders, congregational leaders, anyone who works with people who are trying to quit porn or are doing lessons and teachings on pornography. We've got a really great leader training for you on that. You can sign up for that at sarabrewer.com/leader-training.

All right, you guys, enjoy this episode.

Sara: Hey, you guys, welcome to today's podcast episode. Today we have another What's Possible interview. And our guest today is Josh. Josh, do you want to say hi?

Josh: Yeah, hey.

Sara: We're so glad to have you here, so excited to have you. So you're a member of *Overcome Pornography For Good* and you're just going to kind of share with us your story. And it's just an opportunity for us to celebrate you and everything that you have done. And then a really beautiful

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opportunity for everyone else who's trying to get to where you are to find hope and to find some connection with your story.

So I just love these. I'm so excited. Let's hop into it. Why don't you just kind of give us a timeline and tell us a little bit about your story?

Josh: Great. Yeah, thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to be here and share my story. Yeah, my story with porn started when I was 12 years old, when I first got exposed to porn. I think that's probably a pretty typical timeline for a lot of people.

But yeah, I was sort of immediately hooked and also immediately knew, I just got a sense that this wasn't right, that this wasn't a good thing that I should be doing. So it also sort of immediately came with shame. And so that started my journey, not just with porn, but also with shame and trying to hide it. And yet lots of failed attempts trying to get out.

Sara: Dang it.

Josh: Yeah.

Sara: Yeah. Unfortunately, yeah, that's common. There's the initial viewing. Do you remember, like did it just pop up somewhere or were you curious about sexuality?

Josh: Yeah, I was curious. Yeah, I still have this memory, I think, yeah, it was in the summertime. We went to this river nearby where I live. And people rent inner tubes and get driven up to the river and float down. And I remember just seeing women's bodies on more display that day than what was normal. And I think it was just sexual curiosity.

And so I think, yeah, from there. I think this was the days of dial up internet. And so late at night turning the computer on and that really loud sound and just hoping that my parents wouldn't wake up. And so yeah, at first it was just like searching the internet late at night.

Sara: Yeah, cool. Okay, so keep going, tell us what's next.

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Josh: So yeah, this stuck with me for a long time. I mean, just to give you an idea of the timeline, I think when I joined your program I think it had been like 19 and a half years later or something. And, yeah, the time in between there, I'm a Christian and I would talk to a lot of people in my faith community about this and it was a real struggle. I also worked for a Christian ministry during that time. And I really tried. I tried very, very, very hard.

And I'm a very intentional person and have had a strong will, so I applied all of that to accountability and porn blocking software, reading books, and praying and intense fasting and scripture memory, and just everything that I could think to will my way through the urges that I was experiencing. And I really had very, very little success.

I'd say the majority of that time, yeah, I guess it was seasons. Anywhere from viewing a few times a day to maybe a few times a week. And I'd say there was only one time in that span that I didn't view for probably like three or four months. But aside from that, it was pretty consistent that at least a few times a week I was viewing porn.

And it just ate at me. I hated it. I hated it so bad. And I found myself very, very stuck. And, ultimately, after trying really hard for a really long time, really discouraged, and jaded and having a hard time believing. And, yeah, I just ultimately came to believe that, regardless of what I would tell people, I didn't believe that I would ever be free of porn, certainly not given how thoroughly I tried and how thoroughly I gave myself to the process of doing everything that everybody said and trying really, really hard to get out.

Sara: Yeah, it always really irks me when you hear people talk about people who are struggling with porn like they're just not trying hard enough.

Josh: Yeah.

Sara: Because that is so far from the truth for so many people. And just as you're talking, I can just feel it. And anyone who's really struggled with this for a long time can relate too, like it's just excruciating. Excruciating how hard you're trying.

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Josh: Yeah, definitely, I relate with that. Friends of mine would attest to the fact that when I put my mind to something, I really go after it. And if I apply myself to something, I'm going to do it. And had I never applied myself more thoroughly and more intensely to anything than I did to this process. And it was totally fruitless. So yeah, that was really, really frustrating, and really discouraging.

Sara: Yeah, I can imagine. Yeah. So keep going, tell us what happened next.

Josh: Yeah, so the point where I sort of re-upped. I had just kind of let my foot off the gas for a while in that place of discouragement. I was like, you know what? One thing I haven't done before is seek professional help.

And so I started looking around, came across a few different options and ultimately decided to join your program. And at first I went through a couple of the modules. I think, to be honest, the only one that I made it all the way through was urges, and I forget the name of the other one.

But yeah, I started going through that and felt really committed to going through that. And it was helping my mind, I wasn't initially seeing really much in the way of results, but the crux really came when my wife left town for a few days for a trip with her mom and I was home alone. And I wasn't doing super well as she went on the trip, but in addition to that, the blocking software that I use broke right at the exact time that she left.

Sara: Good timing.

Josh: And so, yeah, so that led to like four days of just binge porn watching, and multiple times a day and worse stuff than what I would typically view. And so that was really, really probably the lowest point that I had been at.

And now I've also got a wife and I've got a son, and I feel like I'm kind of feeling everybody and betraying my wife. I just reread my learn and move on worksheet, and the stuff that I was writing is just like, I am the scum of the earth, I am totally stuck, I am powerless against this.

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And so that also kind of became a crisis of faith, to say I've been following Jesus for like 13 years at a time, and it's just like, God is the God who sets the captive free, and here I am bound. And that crux moment, that crucible moment wound up being my total turnaround, praise God, that it went that way.

And really, what I came to realize in that moment in the aftermath of that binge porn session, was that part of what I learned was from your program and seeing the same principles or themes in the Bible, that it's not by my own will, it's not by my own effort that I'm going to get out of this thing. But it's an identity level shift and it's changing the way that I believe. And a few things really clicked for me in that moment.

Really, the number one big one was changing the way that I believe my thoughts. Like what comes to mind is that I went from experiencing an urge, and that urge to me previously meant I am addicted and this is inevitable. I'm giving in.

After this new belief became a part of my mindset, it changed to I'm experiencing an urge because I have viewed a lot of porn in my life, and that only makes sense. But that doesn't have any implications on me now, I'm free now. And this urge is just porn working its way out of my brain.

And so that really became my primary mindset toward all of my urges, that like, oh, this is just a necessary part of detoxing my brain. I'm already free from porn. I am dead to sin, alive to God, I am no longer a slave, I'm a son. These ideas became core and central to the way I perceived myself, and I started living out of that place.

And another really interesting thing about my story is that I was like, because porn is working its way out of my system, I'm probably going to look at porn again, but it just doesn't mean anything anymore. That was a really interesting thing to try to explain to people at that time.

It was like, yeah, there's a good chance I'm probably going to look at porn a number of more times. I don't know how many, but I'm probably going to keep looking at porn. But that's just because I'm just in the process of not

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looking at porn anymore and it doesn't mean anything. It's just because I'm detoxing.

Sara: This is so good. I'm obsessed with this. I love it. I love it, it's so good. It's like we have these circumstances that we really can't control, the urges. And up until now you had been making these urges mean I'm addicted, or I can't get out, or something's wrong with me.

And for whatever reason, I would like to maybe hear more about this, it was this moment after your wife's trip, but for whatever reason you had this identity shift where you just knew it was done, you're quitting. And so these urges anymore, they're the same thing but now you're making them mean something totally different.

And not even just the urges, but now any slip ups that you have. It's like the slip ups, yeah, I'm not slipping up because I'm stuck in porn. I'm slipping up because I'm quitting porn and I'm getting rid of it.

Josh: Exactly. Exactly. That's exactly where my mind wound up. Yeah, and honestly, it just came in the process of re-examining a lot of familiar passages of the Bible. James two talks about the kind of faith that saves Jesus, like in Him we become the righteousness of God.

Like these things just became like, I know to the depth of who I am that my experience doesn't define me. Only God has the ability to define who I am. And there's a mountain of evidence. I have 19 and a half years, I don't know if I could calculate 365 times 19 and a half years, like how many instances of evidence that I had that I'm stuck in porn. But it didn't mean anything anymore. Instead, I had this new identity that it doesn't mean anything. I'm free from porn. I have victory over porn. I've overcome it. And this is just a part of my story.

And everything, all of the urges I experienced, all the over desire I had, which definitely didn't go away, although it became so much easier, all of that just meant to me that like, oh, this is a part of my story. This is a part of my history, but it has nothing to do with who I am. And it certainly doesn't

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mean that I'm addicted, it certainly doesn't mean that I'm stuck. Just it's like a detox. It's just working its way out.

Sara: So good. So how did you come to this identity or realization? How did you foster that? Did it come pretty quickly and naturally after this moment? What did you do?

Josh: Yeah, I think it was just, again, just kind of meditating on these biblical ideas. Yeah, I think that that was, honestly, that was mostly it.

Sara: So good.

Josh: I'd say it was like two or three weeks thereafter was really when I was examining these things. And I almost put my attempt to stop looking at porn on hold because I was just like, it didn't matter. I just needed to focus on these ideas.

And, yeah, I guess kind of the end result, I mean, there's lots of end results, but that was actually in a couple of weeks, that binge porn session will have been one year ago. And I have not had a single instance of even, honestly, the slightest level of just dabbling in porn in any way or doing some other lower level. It just hasn't touched me since then.

Sara: Wow, congratulations.

Josh: Thank you. It was funny to think about, I was like, I'm probably going to look at porn again, I don't know, a number of times. I don't know how many, but I'm probably going to look at porn again. And that wound up not being true.

Sara: And that doesn't surprise me though. So let me just say my few takes here on this because this process, when you get rid of all the pressure around it, it's so much easier. So when you almost allow yourself to do whatever you need to do and to have the slip ups and to have the weak moments with this just locked in identity that I'm quitting, it doesn't matter.

Josh: Yeah.

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Sara: That's when you can start to see progress. And you're not the first person that I've heard this from or who has experienced this either. So when people are so afraid to let go of that, they need to hold onto it, like no, I can't mess up, I'm going to send them to your episode. I'll be like, go listen to Josh, because allowing yourself to – I love that you used the word detox, however you want to think about it.

Allowing yourself just to go through the process of quitting might mean allowing yourself to slip up, but once you can be okay with that and you're just dead set on the identity and dead set on what you're creating, it's going to be so much easier.

Josh: Yeah, what you said in one of your sessions about Pavlov's dogs, and the second part in particular about how they needed the stimuli enough times to have something be retrained, that really stuck with me where I'm like, okay, I've experienced many urges over the last year. And even just a week or two ago was a time, again, where something difficult was happening and I experienced more urges again.

But I was just like, this is just a part of the process of my brain being rewired. And I will say that although I still experience urges, none of it is difficult anymore. It's a total change, it's like all the wind got taken out of its sails. It's there, but it's not a struggle. I don't fight porn anymore. I haven't fought porn, I think, in a year. It's just been kind of just resting in this change and my self-perception and change in the way that I view myself as somebody who is totally, totally free from porn.

And I haven't had to do any work since then. Or at least, I would say I haven't had to do any battle with porn since then. That's maybe a more accurate way to put it.

Sara: Yeah, when I talk about we're not fighting anymore, we're going to get rid of this fight, that's what I mean. Yeah, it's not going to be a battle anymore. I love that.

Josh: Yeah, the implications of all of this have been pretty incredible. So I think about how earlier my wife couldn't leave the house without feeling

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like, oh, it's inevitable, probably Josh is going to look at porn while I'm gone.

And then after it would happen, I would get angry. And, ironically, I would take that out on her, even though it felt like such a violation of what I should be doing. I don't know how to explain it, but that is what happened. And that's totally gone.

Another really cool thing that has happened in this is that life is full of hard stuff. And previously when something difficult would happen I'd use porn to cope. So something difficult would happen and then in the midst of my struggle I would look at porn.

And then, because I'd feel miserable on giving into other more base desires, more coping elsewhere, which would lead me to then totally drop the ball on whatever I'm doing and make my situation worse. And then I realized more recently that when I would eventually crawl out of that pit, porn became the focus of that issue.

And all I was thinking about is how to not view porn next time. But the pain and struggles in our lives are meant to develop us in all kinds of different ways. And so my personal development was being totally shortcut by the fact that all of my issues became about overcoming porn, instead of learning how to be a better communicator, or working through some issue at work, or something in my marriage, something with parenting, whatever it is.

I've been able to, since I'm not distracted trying to work through my porn habit anymore, I'm able to actually get the personal development that is, I think, intended to take place through some of the harder circumstances in life. So the amount of personal development I've had outside of overcoming porn has been really tremendous over the last years.

I've been able to think about other stuff. And it's like a favorite conversation now, instead of if porn came up, I'm like, oh, how do I hide? Or how do I bring this up? And is it appropriate to talk about now? It's just like, oh, this

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is my favorite topic. I love talking about porn. Let me tell you my story, it's amazing.

And I actually was that way from probably like four or six weeks after this. It's been a year now, but I remember sitting down for lunch with somebody and he had mentioned that he was dealing with issues with porn. And I'm like, I've got this amazing story of overcoming pornography addiction, let me tell you about it. And then I was like, well, it's only been like four or five weeks, but I know I'm free.

Sara: I love it.

Josh: And so there was such confidence. So it's been a favorite topic for the last year or so. And, I mean, I don't cope anymore. I've got more time. I'm more effective at work. Yeah, it's been really, really awesome.

Sara: So awesome. I want to just point out a few things. I know I've said this a few times, but I'm going to say it again. I love how you're taking on this identity of, no, I'm free from this, while simultaneously being like, if I slip up, it doesn't mean anything about me going back to it.

Josh: Right.

Sara: Because I think a lot of people are afraid to take on that identity because they're like, what if I mess up though and it's not true, that I'm not free?

Josh: Yeah. Yeah, I had to come to a place where my circumstances didn't mean anything. And my really significant mountain of 20 years of viewing porn every day didn't mean anything about who I was. And future instances of looking at porn, again, didn't mean anything. Yeah, my identity didn't come from circumstance, it came, for me, from the word of God. And that was enough.

Sara: I love that. I love that and what a beautiful example of using your faith too as a beautiful tool for this identity. I love that. If your faith is not doing

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that for you, re-evaluate and look at your faith, maybe in a different light so that it can start to have this impact on you. That's what it's supposed to be.

Josh: Yeah.

Sara: It's not supposed to be something that holds you down and makes you feel like you're not enough and makes you feel like you're unworthy. It's supposed to be something that, like for you, is setting you free.

Josh: Yeah, very, very empowering. So, yeah, I loved that.

Sara: And that's a question I'll ask people too, is, well, if you weren't struggling with porn, what would you be working on? Let's focus on that for a little bit. Let's just take a break from spending all of our time on porn and let's see what else we can look at. So anyways, I love that. That's so fun.

That's so fun. It's like, oh, finally, this problem of porn that we've been dealing with for 19 years, we're always going to have problems in life and stuff to work through, but it's way more fun to have different ones than the same one forever.

Josh: Yeah. And now, like I said, it's become such a fun topic. I'm excited to share this episode of my story with other people. Every time I hear it, I'm like, oh, you don't know how possible it is. You don't even know. I see the discouragement. I see and I know because I lived it for years and years and years. I see the place that you're in, that you don't think that this is possible for you.

I didn't think it was possible for me. And then everything changed and now it's been a year and I have the whole rest of my life ahead of me, that I just thought it would be forever. And you don't have to be stuck. And what you're believing right now is not true, that it's going to be forever. So yeah, I'm super excited.

I've got two sons, now they're nine months and two years and I will be able to have this conversation instead of, you know, I was afraid that I'd be handing this stuff down. But instead, I can help prevent over desire from

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happening in the first place or help them work through the urges that they will have. And this will be an exciting topic that I'll be able to share with not just friends, but even inside of my own family.

So I'm really, I'm just so stoked on this topic because I experienced how deeply dark it was to feel so, so stuck, and how light and good I feel about the topic now. It's just so exciting and I really want the same for others. And hopefully, I'll have the chance to have many conversations about it over the course of my life.

Sara: Oh, that's beautiful. Thank you for sharing. Absolutely you will. Is there anything else that you might say to someone who is where you were a few years ago, or even younger? Like what's maybe like the last thing, the last piece of advice you would give someone?

Josh: Yeah, a really big part of it would be just that you need to not look at your circumstances, but look to someone else who, whether it's someone with experience like you, Sara, or somebody else in their life, or scripture or whatever else it may be, that has a higher perspective than what you're living in and has seen other people with worse stories than you get out of it. And borrow their confidence if you don't have any of your own. This can be your story as well.

Sara: Yeah, so good. That's part of the purpose of these, borrow Josh's confidence and borrow his experience. And even if you're not totally there yet, I loved – And I'm curious if you experienced any of this, where you're like, well, maybe it's possible. Let me just try on, maybe it's not as hopeless as I thought it was. What if it is possible?

Like just trying it on, and even if it doesn't feel totally solid, because for you it's really solid now and maybe it was. Maybe it happened pretty easily for you, but sometimes it takes some work to get there and that's okay.

Josh: Yeah, for me it was definitely through that crucible moment where I questioned everything over the course of probably three weeks. But it took a very, very low point for me to get that way. But yeah, I think that that

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would make sense that a lot of people would come to that realization of just coming through curiosity.

That curiosity feels so, so powerful and totally capable of displacing these false beliefs about being stuck when you start to examine them and realize it doesn't hold as much credence as you thought it would.

Sara: Yeah, awesome. Well, thank you so much for coming on to share your story.

Josh: Thanks for having me.

Sara: Yeah, it's so helpful and so good and so beautiful. And just congratulations. I just hope that you, if you haven't yet, that you really celebrate yourself. And you think about what that might be, whether that's a journaling session or going on a walk or out to a nice dinner just to bask in what you've been able to accomplish with God and with this beautiful life you have, just the really, really cool transformation you've had.

Congratulations.

Josh: Thanks. Yeah, I'm going to have a big campfire with a bunch of guys and tell them all my story.

Sara: There you go. That's perfect. That's beautiful. I love that. All right, you guys, thanks for listening in today. We'll talk to you next week. Bye bye.

I want to invite you to come and listen to my free class, How To Overcome Pornography For Good Without Using Willpower. We talk about how to stop giving in to urges without pure willpower or relying on phone filters so that you can actually stop wanting pornography.

We talk about how to stop giving up after a few weeks or months. And spoiler alert, the answer isn't have more willpower. And then lastly, we talk about how to make a life without porn easily sustainable and permanent.

If you're trying to quit porn, this class is a game changer. So you can go and sign up at Sarabrewer.com/masterclass, and it is totally free.