

# Live Nude God

by Chad Hall

Why is it that porn sites are so popular? Well, aside from the inherent appeal to all ESPN viewers, porn sites know a few things about human psychology (and anatomy, too, I guess).

One thing the builders of porn sites know is this: the Internet was built for speed and accessibility. Speed can be addictive and very powerful if used effectively. Porn sites give users quick hits (please insert pun here). They are addictive because they collapse the amount of time between each encounter with the ladies. If you don't like the blonde, then a brunette is just a click away.

Satan uses speed every day to addict men and women around the world to the darker side of sexuality. Satan also uses accessibility every day to lure people away from righteousness. Satan and his cronies give Internet users quick access to something they want. We all know that postmoderns want spiritual stuff, so why is it that churches don't give them quick access to God?

I believe the modern church has decidedly made God very inaccessible, especially to postmoderns. What do I mean? Well, take for instance the oft-repeated phrase "I believe in God, but not in religion." What's behind that statement is an underlying dissatisfaction with the church's presentation of God. It seems that the church is trying to hide God behind mediocre systems of theology and banal quips that attest to the fact we've put God in a box (e.g., "God never closes a door without opening a window." "God never gives us more than we can handle." Gimme' a break!). I think these cover-ups actually reveal a kind of hegemonic exercising of threatened power from those who "control" theology and dispense it only as it keeps them in power. That's a whole other discussion, but for whatever reason, church leaders often clothe God beneath impenetrable layers of muck.

What postmoderns really want is *raw* God. We want a naked God. We want an arousing God whom we can see, feel, and experience. And by the way, we want it instantly. Give a postmodern instant accessibility to God and s/he will become addicted to the One Most High (What, you think porn is more addictive than God? Get real.).

VOICE IN MY HEAD: But wait. Isn't God a relationship, and don't relationships take time to develop? That's a good question. Let me address it with a story. I remember hearing an old James Dobson interview with Ted Bundy, you know, the serial killer from the 1970's. Bundy eventually became a follower of Jesus. But way before that dramatic conversion, he raped and murdered a bunch of people. In the interview with Dobson, Bundy attests to the fact that his road to infamy began with a fascination with porn magazines. Luckily, casual encounters with Playboy don't always lead to a life of mindless sex and violence – otherwise my entire 8<sup>th</sup> grade baseball team would have become serial killers.

However, Bundy touches on a powerful truth. In fact, Jesus mentioned this truth as well: mustard seeds eventually get big. Just as easily accessed encounters with nude women can lead to dastardly deeds, so too can brief, quick, and raw encounters with God grow into a deep and very personal relationship. But drawn out, boring, and insipid encounters with a bunch of God-talk will never amount to much of anything. If pictures of nude women can transform ordinary men into monsters, then what can a raw encounter with God do? Just ask S/Paul. A relationship with God does take time to develop, but it can start with one or more quick and powerful interactions with the Almighty. Get a postmodern addicted to God, and you will eventually have a follower of Jesus. The key is this: addiction results from easy access to a very powerful thing.

VOICE IN MY HEAD: *Fine. How then does the church make God easily accessible?*

Here are a few suggestions for church leaders.

First of all, we quit making excuses for God. I think that one of the keys to making God more accessible is to let the mysteriousness of God just hang there. Color commentary is for baseball, not for Christianity, so

let's quit trying to explain God down. In doing so, church leaders too often insulate God and isolate him from those who are seeking a real encounter with him.

For instance, in Numbers 15 Moses and the rest of Jacob's descendants are commanded to stone to death a man who gathered some wood on the Sabbath. Be honest, we don't really like that passage. It sounds awfully harsh. So, we either ignore it or explain it away through some heavy theology. That's because if we can somehow understand it, then it will make sense (and be safe). The only reason any of us went to seminary was so that we could sleep at night after having read the Old Testament. But postmoderns don't really want to understand it or understand God. Can God be understood? For the most part, the answer is "no." But God can be known.

Get this point: Moderns want to examine and reexamine things and then categorize everything into neat little boxes. Postmoderns believe "boxes" (i.e., categories, systems, labels, etc.) are inherently false and manipulative. Modern systems for understanding and explaining God create a distance between postmoderns and the God they seek. Our neat little systems and explanations act as giant prophylactics that keep postmoderns from having a sensual and fertile encounter with God. Or, returning to the earlier analogy of porn, it's like we're putting little black bars over the really interesting (i.e., mysterious) parts of God's character. That's no fun! And postmoderns will *never* become addicted to God when the good parts are blurred. The church must present a live nude God to the world.

We can do this in worship by letting sermons end without easy resolution. Why did God have that dude in Numbers 15 stoned to death? I don't really know (When was the last time you said that in a sermon? Oh, I forgot, Pastors are the experts, so we know everything about God and we have a nifty explanation or teaching lesson for each of God's little quirks.).

VOICE IN MY HEAD: But if we don't explain it, then people will just make up stuff. We'll have a bunch of "build-it-yourself" theologies on the loose!

Well that's not really all that different than what we have now. Church leaders will have to learn to trust that God's Spirit is at least potent enough to guide postmodern people closer to God through ambiguity.

Secondly (remember, the whole point of this article is to give you another stupid list), we can make God accessible using the web. Let's put some naked pictures of God on the Internet!

I'm not web expert, but I guess we could start doing this by allowing people to express their real encounters with the Living Lord in chat rooms or on bulletin boards. Some of these postings will sound heretical, but half the Pentateuch sounds heretical to me (and at least a small portion of James), and the world hasn't ended yet. These raw, nude encounters with God will include a lot of heresy. But the heresy will mix with Truth (the person, you know, Jesus) and produce living interest in God. Think of it like an estuary, where fresh and salt water mix to produce all kinds of living things. Or, to switch metaphors, it takes a lot of crap to make a field fertile, so get used to the smell if you want to produce fruit in the postmodern digital fields.

Third, we can make God accessible by expecting God to be active in the world and by welcoming such activity. In my former hometown, there is a charismatic congregation that is growing like crazy. I mean, it's full tilt, too. They don't just raise their hands and stuff, they actually slay in the Spirit. That stuff scares the bejeebers out of me, but there is also something kind of cool about it because it seems to let God loose. A spring '01 front-page article in Newsweek described the changing face of Christianity in the world. Central to the article was the fact that the emerging theologies in Africa, Asia and Latin America are offensive to Westerners because they just let God too loose. I mean, God is roaming around healing people, providing for needs, raising people from the dead, releasing people from demon possession and stuff like that. That is raw. My contention is that these days the people in third-world economies are producing first-world theologies (i.e., raw, relevant, and real). Postmoderns don't want to hear that the age of miracles is over; we want God to miraculously heal us of our addictions, hurts, and maladies. When did God quit doing stuff like that? Maybe we can export some of that raw theology from the charismatic and third world believers.

Finally, we can make God accessible by becoming theological minimalists. Face it: there is only a little that we really know about God. Paul tells us that we now see through a glass darkly (and this from a guy who had a real-life encounter with Jesus and with angels and all that!). It's not that we are total agnostics. After all, as Christians, we know some basics:

- a. there is a God
- b. you're not God (and neither am I), and though we're created by God we are somehow not in harmony with God or with each other
- c. Jesus is God and he demonstrated God's ultimate love for people
- d. Somehow, through Jesus' birth, life, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension we can have a right relationship with God and with each other (both now and forever)

We might buy those four statements, but there is just a whole lot more that we don't *really* know and that we really don't *need* to know. If we can admit our lack of knowledge and subscribe to a minimalist theology (btw-I'm not saying that a, b, c, and d above is the new minimalist's creed), then we can leave some room open for ambiguity and fertility. As one friend puts it, we need to have a "Who Cares?" theology. What he means is that so much of what we talk about (the exact mechanisms of atonement; the end times; fish or whale?; Calvin v. Wesley; etc.) really has no impact on ministry or on restoring humans into right relationship with God, so who cares about that stuff?

Now that you're really nervous, pray that God will give you a divine lobotomy and help you forget everything you just read. Then pray that God will bring one thing from this article back into your brain and that God will trick you into thinking that that one thing is really your own idea. Then pray that God will use that one thing that is really your own idea to help Jesus be lived more fully in your life, ministry, and context. Peace.

---

Chad Hall is a leader on Innovative Church Team for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.