



I DESPERATELY
WANTED TO
STOP

Name withheld

How I am overcoming my addiction to pornography.

My struggle with pornography began during my youth, when others introduced me to inappropriate materials and behaviors. The gospel was not a major part of my life then. Although my family had attended church through my Primary years, by the time I was 13 or 14, we stopped going altogether. As a result, the teachings of the gospel did not really play a role in my decision making.

It never occurred to me to tell my parents what neighbors and so-called friends were introducing me to. I was too embarrassed to bring up what I had seen and experienced. I had no idea how to deal with it. For decades to come, my pornography addiction would remain my secret.

Influence of the Gospel

Shortly before I graduated from high school, a seemingly small miracle happened, an event that would turn my life in another direction. Despite the distance between my actions and gospel standards, one Sunday morning I followed a strong prompting to go to church and pay tithing. When I arrived at the chapel, I asked for people I knew. One of the names I gave was the Young Men president I had when I was a deacon, the last time I had attended church. He was now serving as bishop of the ward.

That good bishop helped bring me back into the Church. I confessed my sins, and he worked with me to set up a progress plan. Over several months I

repented. I advanced in the priesthood. I held a calling. I was doing so well, in fact, that I was called to serve a mission, and I had a period of several years when my addiction was under control.

Caught in the Net

When I returned home from my mission, I did not struggle with pornography; I simply did not have access to it. That changed in the late 1990s, when the Internet became increasingly pervasive. I accidentally stumbled across some pornographic images online, and I returned to pornographic sites over and over again during the following months. The web had ensnared me.

I wanted to reach out to someone for help, but I wasn't sure whom—or how. How could I talk to my parents about this? How could I admit to my bishop that even though I had made so much progress, I couldn't stop engaging in this immoral behavior? I desperately wanted to stop, but I was too embarrassed by my weakness to confide in anyone, so I kept my addiction to myself.

I didn't even tell my wife, whom I married in 2000. I wanted to tell her about my struggle when we were dating, but I was terrified that she would look down on me or, worse yet, refuse to marry me. So I lied. And I continued to do so in our marriage. I found myself being sneaky to prevent being caught. I hid pictures on my computer. When my wife asked me about particular Internet links, I denied knowing what she was talking about. Addictions

are like that; they create great liars. I knew it was creating a wedge in our marriage and causing her great pain, but I would not acknowledge that I had a problem. What mattered most to me was not my behavior but how people perceived me.

My double life—and the resulting loss of the Spirit—made me vulnerable to increasingly serious sins, including infidelity. My wife had strong impressions that something was wrong and told me about them. With great remorse, I admitted to what I had done.

That was my lowest point, the point at which I realized that *I had to change*. Sitting across from me was the woman I loved. She loved me. I had betrayed her. I determined then to do whatever it took to save our relationship and our family.

Recovery

I began meeting with my bishop regularly in working through the repentance process and Church discipline. He recommended I attend meetings of the addiction recovery program, offered through LDS Family Services. I had never heard of the program. I learned that the group held free, confidential meetings based on the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, adapted into a framework of the doctrines and principles of the Church.

I admit that during the first few meetings, I thought, "I don't need to be here. I don't really have a problem with pornography. I can quit any time." That, of course, wasn't true.

DELIVERANCE: ONLY IN GOD



“Are you struggling with some sin or weakness? It can be something as simple as not having the willpower to rise in the morning early

enough to have time for scripture study and prayer. It can be something so powerful, such as Internet pornography or lack of moral self-control, that you feel you have been pulled down into an abyss and there is no hope for you. Do you find yourself hating what you are doing but not able to find the willpower to turn away from it? Then reach out and humble yourself. The Lord’s enabling power is sufficient to change your heart, to turn your life, to purge your soul. But you must make the first move, which is to humble yourself and realize that only in God can you find deliverance.”

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Be Strong in the Lord,” *Ensign*, July 2004, 12.

With my bishop’s encouragement, I continued to attend. My pride began to melt away, and I began to work the steps of the program: honesty, hope, trust in God, truth, confession, change of heart, humility, seeking forgiveness, restitution and reconciliation, daily accountability, personal revelation, and service. For the first time in a long time, I was living a “sober” life, a life free of pornography. Recovery isn’t ever really “over,” but I had been introduced to a new level of freedom. It came because as I participated in the 12 steps, I came to understand what was behind my addiction.

I learned that most people battling addictions have turned to some kind of “self-medication” to fill the voids they feel in their lives. Pain, sorrow, loneliness, fear, or other kinds of discomfort can act as triggers that can entice people to use this self-medication to make them feel better. Some people use prescription drugs. Others use illicit drugs. Others use alcohol. For me, pornography offered the short-term, artificial “quick fix” I thought I needed.

Knowing what triggered my addiction was one thing. Avoiding environments that aided my addiction was another. This stance requires being vigilant 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the rest of my life. I cannot get online “just to browse.” In fact, if I am by myself, I don’t go online at all. I can’t look at an ad and entertain thoughts in my mind. We don’t have cable TV in our home. When I commute to work, I avoid taking certain roads because I know there are billboards along those roads that could trigger inappropriate thoughts. If I start to slip and my mind begins to wander, I turn to my wife, to my bishop, and to prayer for strength.

My addiction affects the most minute parts of my life, but taking these precautions is worth it. I cannot neglect these defenses because I know what my addiction can do to me and to those I love.

Reliance on Deity

It’s not just a matter of avoiding the bad, though. I also must make

constant, conscious efforts to turn to the good. Several of the 12 steps have helped me do this by bringing me closer to God.

Every day when I wake up, I get on my knees and thank Heavenly Father for giving me the opportunity to repent of my sins and to come to Him through the Atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ. I ask Him to let me know His will so that I can do it. I ask Him to lead me away from temptation. I pray as though I rely on Heavenly Father every minute of the day—because I do—and I keep that prayer in my heart throughout the day. I pray again each night. I also spend some time in the scriptures daily so that I can focus my thoughts on virtuous things. If I don’t make these a habit, I don’t have the Spirit in my life. And left on my own, I am not strong enough to resist temptation.

For a long time I believed I could overcome my behavior anytime I wanted to by my own willpower. But I failed miserably. After a while I got tired of doing it on my own, especially when “on my own” wasn’t working. I realized that I could not do what I needed to do without the Lord’s help. Ether 12:27 helped me understand this better. The Lord told Moroni, “My grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.”

Once I went to Him, still doing all I could do (see 2 Nephi 25:23), I realized that I could do much better and

become much more with His help than I ever could dream of by relying on my own merits (see Alma 7:14).

My wife and I now serve as facilitators at the addiction recovery program meetings. She has learned—and is helping others understand—that the Atonement is for not only those who are working to overcome an addiction but also those who have been affected by the addiction through no choice of their own. If we turn to the Savior, His grace can work in all of our lives.

To those who are battling addiction and to the people they love, I can attest that there is hope. There is always hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Hope in the Savior

I am deeply grateful to Jesus Christ because He literally saved me from the chains of sin. Addiction is like being held by chains that “bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe” (2 Nephi 1:13). When I realized I was in trouble, I didn’t know where to turn. I was desperate because I could not free myself from my predicament. But the Lord could free me. When I turned to Him, He was there to help.

I can relate with Ammon: “Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things” (Alma 26:12). I know that God *can* help us do all things, including overcoming the chains of addiction. ■



HELP IN OVERCOMING PORNOGRAPHY

The *addiction recovery program*, offered through LDS Family Services, includes free, confidential support meetings for people dealing with addictions to alcohol, drugs (both prescription and illegal), tobacco, coffee or tea, pornography, inappropriate sexual behavior, gambling, codependency, and eating disorders. To find a meeting near you, visit www.ldsfamilyservices.org. Your priesthood leader may also have information about nearby meetings.

Even if you cannot attend one of the meetings, you may benefit from the program study guide. *Addiction Recovery Program: A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing* (item no. 36764) is available in many languages from Distribution Services or as a PDF at www.recoveryworkbook.lds.org.

CombatingPornography.org is a Church-sponsored website offering help for individuals facing addiction. It can also help their spouses, parents, and priesthood leaders.

Let Virtue Garnish Thy Thoughts (item no. 00460) is a booklet designed to help those struggling with pornography. It discusses how to recognize destructive media, resist and avoid the temptation of pornography, and abandon pornography addictions. It also lists scriptures and other Church resources on repentance, the sanctity of the body, and overcoming worldly influences. Church leaders and family members can share the booklet with loved ones struggling with pornography. The booklet is available from Distribution Services in many languages. It is also available in American Sign Language on DVD.

Other talks and articles on this topic are listed at www.liahona.lds.org.