

Name Withheld

About a week after my husband and I were married in the temple, I learned he had not lived the virtuous life that I thought he had. Surprised and devastated, I literally ran away for a couple of hours. Over the next several years, additional details about his behavior crept out. Over and over again my heart was “pierced with deep wounds” (Jacob 2:35). Each time, I hoped it would be his last confession.

Although my husband had given up many wrong behaviors since his youth, he eventually told me that he had problems with viewing and listening to inappropriate media and keeping his thoughts clean. He explained that he had not been able to stop having sexual fantasies. Because I’d had some training in behavior change, I realized that these behaviors were likely part of a lifelong sex addiction.

Because he was not physically acting out on his addiction for the most part, it was easy for him to justify his behavior. He rationalized that because so much of it was in his mind, it was not that serious. However, he still knew that the behavior was wrong. He wanted to stop and he repeatedly asked for forgiveness every time he slipped. He wanted to experience the true “change of heart” and receive the image of the Lord in his countenance (Alma 5:14). He knew

that to do this, he needed to get out of the rut he was in and get on a higher spiritual plane through sincere prayer, fasting, meditation, serious scripture study, and other activities that could bring him closer to Heavenly Father. With that desire, we began working with our bishop—both separately and together—toward repentance and recovery.

We found endless help for *him*, but it was more difficult to find it for *me*. True, he was the one facing the addiction, but I hurt too. In fact, my heart ached as though my husband had been physically unfaithful. I no longer trusted him. The Savior’s declaration “that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:28) ran through my mind, and Alma’s teachings that “our thoughts will also condemn us” (Alma 12:14) caused me to worry for my husband. I felt sick, angry, hurt, and betrayed. I asked, “Why did this happen to me?” and “Why didn’t he have the decency to tell me about this before we were married?”

I continued to feel this way, even as my husband was taking steps toward change and making great progress. Of course, this was not how I wanted to feel in a celestial marriage. I knew that if I could set aside my hurt and anger, I could be a true “help meet” to my husband

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(Abraham 5:14). We also knew it was not good for him to go through this alone (see Abraham 5:14). This could be an opportunity for me to help bear his burdens (see Mosiah 18:8).

As we worked through the recovery process, I found that although I could not control my husband's thoughts and behaviors, I could control my thoughts and feelings toward him. And, although at that point I felt I could not trust my husband, I knew I could trust the Lord. I found comfort in my scripture study, temple worship, Church meetings, fasting, and priesthood blessings. Beyond these traditional sources of comfort, I found several great helps in overcoming my hurt and anger: prayer and personal revelation, education, and support. These things eventually helped me to rebuild trust and love.

Prayer and Personal Revelation

There were many times, day and night, when I found myself in tears, praying for help and comfort. How grateful I am for personal revelation that brought customized answers, often more quickly than I had expected. I could feel that the Lord was aware of our challenges and that He was helping us win this battle.

One of the most helpful things I recognized early on was that my husband was a son of God. This meant that he had divine potential. How sad that a son of God would be plagued with such a trial! However, because of his godlike potential, my

The only way through this trial is for both husband and wife to be headed in the same righteous direction.



husband could overcome this. That brought me great comfort and peace.

A while later, I learned my husband was truly my brother. I have wonderful earthly brothers of whom I think highly. If I learned one of them had a sex addiction, my first reaction would be sorrow. I would do everything I could to support and love him as he worked to overcome his trial. Every time I remembered this, I felt a softening influence, and my desire to help my husband would grow.

I also realized that this addiction was primarily *my husband's* trial, not mine. *He* needed to overcome it by faith and repentance through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. This helped me feel compassion toward my husband. I could support, pray for, listen to, encourage, coach, share my feelings with, and love him, but I could not change him myself, and I must not police his actions or take his behavior as a personal attack.

I also felt that if I did not forgive my husband and let go of all my angry feelings, then the "greater

When I learned of my husband's sexual addictions, my heart ached as though he had been physically unfaithful.

sin” lay upon me (D&C 64:9). It seems easy to say that his sins were more severe than my negative thoughts; but, if he truly repented of his behavior and I continued to harbor ill feelings, then surely I would commit the greater sin.

Our Heavenly Father wants us *all* back, whether we have committed great or small sins, for “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10). The Savior would not turn my husband away, so why should I? I should forgive my husband as often as required (see Matthew 18:21–22). Of course, personally forgiving someone doesn’t mean *not* holding them responsible for their actions. I could forgive him while still helping him work through the real consequences of his behavior.

I know that sometimes a wife feels so hurt that she justifies reopening her husband’s past wounds to make him



HE HEALS THE HEAVY LADEN

Come unto me,’ the Savior said, ‘and ye shall find rest unto your souls’ (Matthew 11:28–29). . . .

“A woman whose marriage was threatened by her husband’s addiction to pornography wrote how she stood beside him for five pain-filled years until, as she said, ‘through the gift of our precious Savior’s glorious Atonement and what He taught me about forgiveness, [my husband] finally is free—and so am I.’ As one who needed no cleansing from sin, but only sought a loved one’s deliverance from captivity, she wrote this advice:

“ ‘Commune with the Lord. . . . He is your best friend! He knows your pain because He has felt it for you already. He is ready to carry that burden. Trust Him enough to place it at His feet and allow Him to carry it for you. Then you can have your anguish replaced with His peace, in the very depths of your soul’ (letter dated Apr. 18, 2005).”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “He Heals the Heavy Laden,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 8.

suffer for the pain he has caused her. I came to realize that doing this hinders progress and widens a gap between spouses. The only way through this trial is for both husband and wife to be headed in the same righteous direction.

Education

As part of our recovery, my husband and I chose to attend counseling together, which greatly helped my husband, because it gave him someone outside our home to whom he could report his progress. Counseling was beneficial to me because I was able to get a clear picture of where my husband was in his recovery. It also allowed us to talk to someone who was an expert and who could tell us what to expect in cases like ours.

For me, even more important than counseling was personal study and education. Of course, because everyone’s experience is different, everyone’s education will be too. Thankfully there are many appropriate resources available for understanding and overcoming sex addictions. I studied many gospel-related materials on the topic, including the Addiction Recovery Program workbook from LDS Family Services, articles on LDS.org, BYU Education Week lectures, and many books. My study taught me

more about addiction, withdrawal, and relapse and it taught me how to help and be supportive. As I read accounts from other women whose spouses have sex addictions, I learned that it was natural for me to experience hurt and anger. By empowering myself with knowledge, I felt secure in doing all I could.

Support

My husband and I were talking with our counselor and were very open with each other, but for



some reason, I still needed to talk with a woman. Because of the sensitivity of the subject, I did not feel that I could talk with my mother, my sister, or my friends. I felt totally isolated. One evening while meeting with our bishop, I told him that I needed to talk to someone in a similar situation, but how?

He told me that LDS Family Services had a missionary-led support group in our area for the spouses of those addicted to pornography. That was exactly what I was looking for! Still, I went with much anxiety to my first group meeting. I was met, though, with warm smiles and a comfortable atmosphere. I was able to cry and share my feelings of hurt, anger, and disappointment and to learn wonderful, healing gospel principles from others through the Spirit. The associations I made there became strong as I was able to “mourn with those that mourn” (Mosiah 18:9). I continue to wonder about and sometimes pray for the sisters from our group meeting.

Rebuilding Trust and Love

As time has passed and my hurt and angry feelings have subsided, I continue to work on trusting and loving my husband. The Spirit is the only one who can tell me when the time is right to trust. We still have hard days, and it is an ongoing battle, but as my husband confides his innermost thoughts and feelings to me each day, I am able to have increased trust that he’s not hiding anything from me anymore. As my trust grows, so does my love.

With sufficient time for trust to be restored—between us and between my husband and the Lord—I felt, and my husband agreed, that to keep him and us strong we needed to attend the temple more frequently. We try to alternate temple dates with more interactive dates, thus improving our spiritual relationship and our friendship. When I see my husband’s increased dedication to the Lord, it improves my trust in him. When my husband shows sensitivity toward me by arranging dates

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and helping with household duties, he invites me to love and trust him.

The Atonement is the last but most important thing that has brought me increased trust and love. With a problem so trying, I had to give it to the Lord; I could not carry it alone. The Savior will heal each of us—no matter our problem—if we will let Him. He suffered for our pains, afflictions, temptations, sicknesses, and infirmities (see Alma 7:11–12). Although my husband and I struggled in different ways because of this addiction, the Savior’s healing was powerful and uniquely suited for each of us. When we trust Him, peace will come, and we will be able to forget our anger and hurt. Once again, we will be able to have confidence in those who have pierced us with deep wounds but who have, through the process of true repentance and the power of the Atonement, worked to regain our trust and love. ■

The Church offers support groups, sponsored by LDS Family Services, for those addicted to pornography as well as for their spouses and others who might be affected. To find out more, visit ldsfamilyservices.org or contact the LDS Family Services office nearest you.

ADDITIONAL ARTICLES

For more on this subject, see the following:

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “He Heals the Heavy Laden,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 6–9.
2. Michael D. Gardner, “Hope, Healing, and Dealing with Addiction,” *Ensign*, July 2008, 50–53.
3. Name Withheld, “My Husband’s Addiction,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2006, 20–23.