

# Finding True Recovery

## Talking with My Girlfriend about My Pornography Use

Knowing what we know now, there are a few things we would have done differently before we got married.

### Name withheld

**T**he more committed Megan (name has been changed) and I became to our growing relationship, the clearer it was to both of us that we were not only falling in love but possibly heading toward marriage.

Part of me wanted to open up and share everything about my past with her—including my pornography use. Another part of me was terrified! I had learned that secrecy, isolation, and lies were the seedbed of pornography problems. I didn't want a relationship where we kept things from one another. But I was also filled with all kinds of fears and doubts. "What if she chooses to dump me? Can I cope with rejection?"

And yet I didn't want an eternal companion who was unable to understand what I'd been through spiritually and appreciate where I am now.

No, she had to know. But I wanted to do it the right way. I just didn't know how to bring it up. I also wondered: How much does she need to know? How far into the relationship should we be before I tell her? How long should a person be free from pornography before marrying?

The questions were overwhelming.

But Megan was a few steps ahead of me. One night, she bluntly asked, "Have you ever had a problem with pornography?"

"Yeah, I have," I said.

I watched her recoil and look away.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I've been trying to figure out the right way and time to tell you. I'm willing to answer any questions you have."



Megan was surprised but said she appreciated my openness and willingness to tell her about it. She said she needed some space to process what I had told her. Since I understood that pornography is a big, scary thing and something to take seriously, I respected her wishes.

Over the next few days I worried and prayed—a lot. My thoughts raced back to when I had been dating another girl seriously, and my struggle with pornography was one of the reasons that relationship had fallen apart. That led me to pray even harder that Megan would have the ability to handle this.

I soon realized, however, that I needed to allow Megan to make whatever decision was right for her, and I needed to accept her decision. In that moment, the Spirit comforted me. My prayers thereafter moved away from what I wanted and shifted to submitting myself to the Lord's will. Because of the power of the Savior's Atonement, I knew I could own the consequences of my prior decisions. I had walked with Him through my journey of repentance long enough to know that, regardless of the outcome, He would have my back.

## AN HONEST DISCUSSION

When Megan felt ready, we continued our conversation a few days later. She told me that she was battling mixed feelings

toward me but also wishing she could forget about her feelings and just walk away. She explained that she had been through some traumatic experiences because of people who had used pornography and that she'd be lying if she said she didn't look at me differently now.

After a long pause, she said, "So, are you still using pornography?" "No, I'm in a good place now."

"How bad was your problem?" she continued.

I responded, openly, "It was serious. I battled with it for years and worked with a therapist to get where I am now."

I reassured her that I *had* made progress and was in one of the longest periods of sobriety I had experienced. I felt confident I would never go back to it—although I would later find that I wasn't as strong, or prepared, as I thought.

I felt sincere sorrow for my past decisions and felt compassion for her. I assured her that while I wanted us to be together, I understood her feelings and would support whatever choice she made. Our discussion was frank, honest, and, at times, awkward.

She concluded that my heart was in the right place and that she trusted me enough to move forward with the relationship. Although I was honest with her about my experience, I was not as far along in my healing as I thought. There were more lessons to be learned.



## SOME LESSONS LEARNED

Through these and subsequent conversations and experiences, Megan and I learned a great deal. Here are eight points from our experience that we hope can help you in your conversations.

### 1. Pornography Needs to Be Talked About

Not only was it helpful for us to have this kind of conversation, but it was also essential. In my view, it's essential for *any* couple whose relationship and commitment to each other are progressing toward marriage.

### 2. Timing Is Important

The more love and compassion between the couple, the more effective these conversations will be. If the relationship is not developed, your motivation to be open and the ability of the person you're dating to receive any honest disclosure may be limited. I would recommend that the conversation be held as soon as either dating partner feels the relationship has developed to the point of exclusivity and mutual commitment.

### 3. Be Open; Resist Becoming Defensive

It's also important not to be defensive. For years I lied about my pornography problem, distanced myself from loved ones, became defensive and grumpy with my family, and thought I would get over it on my own. But opening up about it is what made all the difference.

Being open provides an opportunity for the Spirit to help increase your gratitude for Christ's atoning sacrifice and strengthen your testimony—experiences that will help you bless others in the future.

### 4. Prepare to Ask the Right Questions

All of Megan's questions and all my answers were about abstaining—not *real* recovery. We both needed to understand how serious my problem with pornography had actually been and what it would take to reach a point of actual healing. We didn't realize the additional work we would need to do together, and individually, to prepare for a strong marriage.

Questions we'd encourage you to ask include:

- What are you currently doing to respond in healthy ways to your triggers and deeper, underlying needs?
- What has motivated you to change and what motivates you currently?
- What has the repentance (change) and healing process been like for you?
- How has counseling with your bishop helped?
- Did you ever feel the need to seek professional help?
- What have you learned about the underlying biological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors that have contributed to your pornography use?
- What will we do to ensure that we keep the lines of communication open in our marriage and maintain a connection in spite of any future relapses? How will we handle any relapses?

## 5. Make It an Ongoing Conversation

What we shared and learned together could never be handled adequately in one discussion. This is true no matter how long you talk or how much you want to just handle it and move on. For us, working together to safeguard our relationship and to continue growing and healing has become an ongoing exploration, discovery, and response.

## 6. Let Faith and Faithfulness Be a Factor

I would encourage both people in the relationship to trust in the power of Jesus Christ's Atonement to not only help heal the effects of pornography but also help both of them grow and change as they work together on improving themselves and their relationship.

Exercising faith requires surrendering everything you have to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ with the belief that They have the desire, power, and ability to create a better version of you.

## 7. Get All the Help You Can

Months after Megan's conclusion to trust me, I relapsed. Coming forward with this confession to both Megan and my bishop was humiliating for me and extremely painful for Megan, who thought this meant that I was unable to ever overcome my pornography problem.

We were counseled to look for guidance on [addressingpornography.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://addressingpornography.ChurchofJesusChrist.org). Listening to prophetic guidance and stories of healing gave us hope. I learned more about what real recovery entails. Megan learned that the emotions she was experiencing were normal, that she needed her own healing, and that it was necessary to set boundaries to restore stability and trust.

We were also counseled to seek therapy. This was immensely helpful. I had always clung to the belief that pornography was something I could overcome on my own. It wasn't. I needed my bishop, a therapist, the support of my family and closest

friends, and, most of all, a deeper understanding of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, which I gained by developing a pattern of relying on His merits to both forgive and change me. Real recovery requires a complete change of heart that only Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost can provide.

## 8. Remember Who You Are

Pornography doesn't define you. Your identity as a son or daughter of God defines you. Megan and I eventually married in the temple. Your circumstance may end differently. But whether the relationship proceeds or not, it's important to remember that the impact of pornography on your own life and on the lives of others can be devastating. Any effort to get help will draw you closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and lasting healing. Your Father in Heaven wants you to achieve every blessing and experience happiness. With help from others and through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, healing is possible. ■

Home page of [addressingpornography.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://addressingpornography.ChurchofJesusChrist.org)